

30
For my Dearest Mother:

This the second book
I ever bound, - may it
make up in love what
it lacks in Craftsmanship!

Happy Valentine's Day -

Eleanor. 1948.

For

(

SELECTED POEMS OF
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE



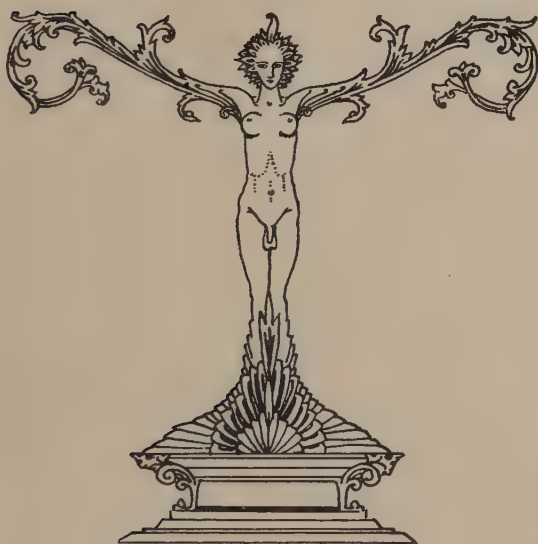
SELECTED POEMS OF
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

With Illustrations and Decorations by

HARRY CLARKE

and an Introduction by

HUMBERT WOLFE



London:

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LTD

New York:

DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

This Edition first published in 1928

This volume is published by arrangement
with Messrs. William Heinemann

Printed in England
Text by J. Curwen & Sons Limited
Photogravure plates by Nickeloid

SWINBURNE

Preface

WALMER VILLAS is a grey street of semi-detached houses sloping up sharply from Manningham Lane. There used to be a certain grim quiet about it, as though stillness had been trapped between buildings that held hard onto anything they caught. You could, of course, hear in those days the rumbling of carts along the uneven stones of the Lane, and the occasional screaming progressions of the steam-tram. But the street was marked by that fierce reticence, which in Bradford, at least, converted the Yorkshireman's home into his dungeon.

No. 6 (I think it was No. 6), however, differed sharply from its neighbours. It was as grey and as gaunt and as petrified, but it looked in a queer way open instead of shut. You could not at first analyse that impression, but you were conscious of some barrier removed, some iron obstacle wanting. Suddenly your eye informed the waiting brain: there were no lace curtains over the bare windows. It was bewildering: it was almost indecent. It was also inexplicable, since poverty was clearly not the reason. Inexplicable till you learned that it was the home of the parents of Will Rothenstein and Albert Rutherston. Some regarded it as a defiance: others as an advertisement. But all agreed that it was improper.

The house and the inmates, however, didn't care. The rooms were cool, empty, and large, though of the same dimensions as the stuffy, full, and small ones next door.

The few pieces of furniture were all good, and there were pictures by Will, John, and Steer on the plain walls. The house was, indeed, an outpost of Fitzroy Street, standing carelessly at guard on hostile territory. It was besieged, but it was not afraid. It could look after itself.

It was to this house that Albert had returned from the Slade School to recover from a temporary breakdown due to overwork, and it was in an upper bedroom looking out, I think, on the Ackroyd's black backyard and ashpit that he read to me, aged sixteen, a poem, 'Dolores', by a living poet, Algernon Charles Swinburne, of whom I had not previously heard.

I remember that moment because it was the beginning of poetry for me. Albert sat up in bed, an incredibly bright little object with the black linen-covered book in his hand, and I sat crumpled up in an arm-chair at the foot of the bed. I do not know how he came to read or why. I had come on my daily visit to learn what life meant—life of the studio, of great men and beautiful women, of the roaring, bounteous streets of the capital city. Albert had often, indeed continuously, spoken to me of painting, but I do not remember his ever having mentioned poets or poetry. Nor do I think that I should have been interested if he had. Poets formed for me at that time a part of English Literature, which was at school not an object but a subject. I had several speeches out of Shakespeare's plays by heart. I had plodded through and hated *In Memoriam*, and I was in general conscious of Wordsworth and Thomas Gray.

It excited no particular emotion in me when Albert lifted *Poems and Ballads* from the dressing-table and asked, as he fluttered the pages, 'Do you know Swinburne?' I

wished, of course, to say that I knew him well. I hated the continuous 'No', which was necessarily my response in conversations which only too often began with 'Have you read?', 'Have you heard?', 'Have you seen?' I had never read, I had never heard, I had never seen. I felt a faint preliminary grievance against this Swinburne, one more flashing confirmation of my ignorance and youth.

Albert began reading. I doubt whether I was listening very attentively at the outset:

Cold eyelids that hide like a jewel
 Hard eyes that grow soft for an hour;
 The heavy white limbs, and the cruel
 Red mouth like a venomous flower.

The words must have begun to ring the bell on the locked door of my unconscious self, but I was, I suppose, in the attics and didn't hear the first premonitory note. Albert read on:

We shift and bedeck and bedrape us,
 Thou art noble and nude and antique;
 Libitina thy mother, Priapus
 Thy father, a Tuscan and Greek.

I began to wake to a new and not wholly agreeable sensation. Something or some one was tugging at me. I looked round for two cool dry hands that seemed to be creeping down to my heart. The reading continued:

Ah, beautiful passionate body
 That never has ached with a heart!
 On thy mouth though the kisses are bloody,
 Though they sting till it shudder and smart.

I was listening with all my ears now, baffled, surprised, and even terrified by what I heard. The reticences and curiosities of adolescence were raising shrill cries and counter-cries. There was a movement in my blood like that of the restless citizens in the Shakespearean crowd listening to Antony. Here was the orator who had the word that loosens, changes, maddens and, perhaps, deifies. The Orator took string after string of a boy's heart and swept it with remorseless fingers:

Wilt thou smile as a woman disdaining
 The light fire in the veins of a boy?
 But he comes to thee sad, without feigning,
 Who has wearied of sorrow and joy.

It was no longer a back bedroom in Walmer Villas; no more was it Albert reading from a book of verse as part of my education. Life had appeared in the image of 'the implacable beautiful tyrant'. I was not my own man any longer. I was the sound of the harp-player, carelessly, beautifully, damnably played:

And a sound as the sound of loud water
 Smote far through the flight of the fires,
 And mixed with the lightning of slaughter
 A thunder of lyres.

I heard the lyres. I was the lyres. I forgot even to be ashamed that the tune, that had changed the world, was

seamed with sharp lips and fierce fingers,
 and branded by kisses that bruise.

I did not ask why Beauty came thus, why her hands were curved and cruel on the heart-strings. I remembered nothing of my patient boyish plans, my fierce self-restraints, my shynesses and my virtue. Nothing mattered, would ever matter, but the music that was rising, burning and breaking till the roof of the world broke open like a rose. Higher and higher it tossed and volleyed. Higher and higher I rose with it, like a black feather sucked out and up by the draught of a flame. Out and up until, with a great blare of the fiery trumpets, life went by me like a smoke. I stood at the quiet heart of the cyclone with the birds and butterflies, hearing after the storm the terrible authority of the still small voice that, as though it were pronouncing my doom and my fate, whispered like snowflakes falling on a wound:

Thou wert fair in the fearless old fashion,
 And thy limbs are a melody yet,
 And move to the music of passion
 With lithe and lascivious regret.
 What ailed us, O gods, to desert you
 For creeds that refuse and restrain?
 Come down and redeem us from virtue,
 Our Lady of Pain.

The voice went on, but I did not listen, or, if I listened, could not hear. Something in me had died, and something had been born. 'What is it?' said Albert's voice a long time after. 'I don't know,' I said. 'Is something the matter with you?' he insisted. 'I don't know,' I repeated—and I shall never know.

Since, therefore, in actual physical fact, if there is a poet

in me he was born in that moment in Swinburne, it is not easy for me to bring a critical estimate to the consideration of his work. I am confused by memory and by echoes. I cannot altogether divest myself of the attitude of a believer to some text which was his key to faith. 'What does it matter', such a one reflects, 'what others think or say? There is something personal here and private to me. They cannot share it, and I will not share it with them.' So when I approach the first volume of *Poems and Ballads* I do not see it first or only as verse. It is still part of a revelation. I should so much rather recapture the first glow than now seek to analyse its cause.

There is another reason why I am an unsuitable critic of Swinburne. Unlike other more ranging minds, I did not after *Poems and Ballads* seek for further acquaintance with Swinburne. I do not know whether I feared that, like an overcharged electric wire, I could not carry another volt of beauty, or whether I dreaded a disappointment. The first volume was my breviary, over which I was happy to brood and mutter. I asked no more of Swinburne. He had already given me all that any man could ask of another. It was at least five years later, at Oxford, that I adventured beyond the Cyclades to the later volumes of *The Poems and Ballads* and to *Songs before Sunrise*. I was much older and had acquired new standards. There were other poets in the world for me. I dared hardly believe that a repetition of that first ardour awaited me. I reached the second volume, I remember, under the cedar in Wadham Gardens, that is there no longer. There was every circumstance of beauty to create the mood of enchantment—the copper beeches, the crouched cedar, the college kneeling on its lawn. This was, the spirit might have urged, a truer setting

than Walmer Villas for the reception of a poet. But there was something missing in me that had been active at Bradford, a hushed, unconscious anticipation, the vigil before the first surrender. I confess at once that I read with a deepening sense of dismay. 'The Last Oracle' was so long and so difficult a movement, 'In the Bay' longer still, and with too easy a movement. 'A Forsaken Garden' and 'At a Month's End', however, laid a finger near the strings, only to be plucked away with 'A Wasted Vigil' and all the elegiacs that followed. It had been late afternoon when I started reading. The shadows were round my feet as I drew to an end, cold, doubtful, and depressed. I had almost set the book down when my eye came on

When I had wings, my brother,
Such wings were mine as thine.

It was a heavenly reproach, and a consolation. Not mine the wings of the seamew, nor the flight of the poet. But Swinburne out of his wild Septembers called back to me in my April, telling me that even for those with wings there is an end of things fair that seemed in youth eternal. It was in no spirit of exaltation that I went back to my room on No. 10 staircase. Even the poet, even poetry, it seemed, must at the last bid wings good-bye.

For these reasons my judgement of Swinburne is necessarily too touched with emotion and too limited in scope. Although I have in later years discovered virtues and beauties in the later lyrics, in the Greek, and at times in the other plays, Swinburne will always at heart be for me the poet of the first volume of *Poems and Ballads*, and in that regard not only a poet, but a prophet crowned with

light. But since I know that view to be personal and to a large degree false, I have severely schooled myself, attempting to approach him as though he were just any great poet, and not *my* poet. I cannot expect that I shall have much success.

I begin by asking myself what Swinburne's appearance meant to English verse. The dates are not without their importance. Swinburne's first published volume, *The Queen Mother and Rosamond*, appeared in 1860. *Atalanta in Calydon* appeared in 1865, and *Poems and Ballads* in 1866. We are, therefore, at the fringe of the Götterdämmerung of the great Victorians. For many years yet Tennyson was to stagger under the weight of his honours and the obligation he laid on himself to write, if he could no longer as a poet, then at least as a Poet Laureate. Many years were to elapse before it could even be suggested that Browning, and not Tennyson, was 'the mover and maker' of the age. For many years the settled sense of invulnerable comfort was to change the home of the Muses into a padded room that might, and, indeed, very nearly did, convert poetry into a fitting tenant. The shades of great names deepened and darkened. Matthew Arnold, that great poet who might have ripped up the quiet, had fled the greetings, tears and smiles of his contemporaries with his own scholar-gipsy. There was doubt, indeed, but it was religious doubt. It was not the shadow of Swinburne, but of an ancestral monkey, that disturbed men's minds, if they were disturbed at all. The future, the prophets might have guessed, was with the biologists and not with the poets, but, as so often happens, the prophets would have been wrong.

Before 1860 the first revolt against the petrification of

verse had begun with Rossetti and Morris. *The Germ*, containing 'The Blessed Damozel', had appeared, and in 1858 Morris published 'The Defence of Guinevere'. It was no less a revolt, because it sought to pour the old wine of the early Renaissance into new bottles. It is, after all, as difficult, and sometimes as stimulating, to recall dead beauty as to invent beauty yet unborn. Strangely the roses of the Medici must have appeared to shed a poisoned fragrance in the rep-haunted drawing-rooms of Victoria. The first *fleurs du mal* were blossoming and breaking in England. But England could rely on her Tennyson. He let in the temperate air of compromise, in which no malicious orchid could live.

But Tennyson, it appeared, was sleeping or on a journey. For now, in the middle of the resumed Sunday afternoon stillness of poetic thought, cries were heard, shriller and shriller, cries like none that had desecrated English repose since Byron died in Greece. They had the same hint of the vine-leaves, the bare bright breasts, and the far-off whisper of the mad beautiful god. Once again the Dionysian was to trample the daisies of the vicarage lawn, and not all the poetic locks, squash clerical hat and flowing cloak of the Laureate could allay him. Iacchus had returned with the wine, the rapture, and the terror.

If that picture is regarded as hot and overdrawn, *adsit testis* John Morley. Let us not forget, nor fail to honour that cool memory. Britain was once again in danger of beauty. Darwin with his monkeys was a menace, but an honest menace to be defeated in the open by conglomerate ignorance. But this was insidious. This called in question not merely religion, but life. Was it, perhaps,

possible that a generation that had successfully achieved the Great Exhibition and the Crimean War was not, as it had been led to believe, in possession of all wisdom, all charity, and all the virtues? Had some fairy, the most powerful of all, been forgotten at the christening? Could she return with a curse that would strip the world bare—she and her doves with her—the lady whose awful name only Mr. Gladstone, as a classical scholar, had previously heard?

It was ridiculous; it was childish; it was an outrage, and it was not to be tolerated. Let the beadle be summoned, so that she and her no doubt illegitimate brat could be put under lock and key in the workhouse—that consummation of the age's charity. Send for the beadle! There was no need for England to be disturbed, to scurry hither and thither. While Mr. John Morley was available to wield an anonymous pen in *The Saturday Review* the beadle would not be wanting. Scarce had the cymbals crashed, scarce had that marvel descended, like roses from the roof at a Roman banquet, on the flushed faces and distended forms of a generation of self-satisfied Liverymen after a city dinner, when the reassuring footsteps of the guardian of law and order were heard, heavy and slow. Honest John Morley was at hand.

The image of the Mænads was not idly invoked. On the 4th of August 1866 Mr. Morley was able to report to a terrified world that order had been restored. His firm flat feet had trodden out the roses; his staff had descended on the fairest and most defenceless shoulders with unerring brutality; beauty had been hurried back to the workhouse, and there, underfed and starved of light, would be

re clothed in the pauper uniform which the taste of the ages dictated. Idle exaggeration? On the 5th of August, Payne—the publisher of *Poems and Ballads*—withdrew the book from circulation.

‘Mr. Swinburne’, observed Mr. Morley, rightly disdaining to sign his article with his own name when he spoke for Britain, ‘deserves credit for the audacious courage with which he has revealed a mind all aflame with the feverish carnality of a schoolboy over the dirtiest passages in *Lemprière*.’ This was admirable, because, apart from its vigour, it flattered the public mind by imitating its faults of style. Mr. Morley even surrendered his control of prepositions to his zeal for public rectitude. He continued through a *crescendo* of epithets, like the scream of police-whistles summoning assistance, to this final baton-stroke: ‘The bottomless pit encompasses us on one side and stews and bagnios on the other. He is either the vindictive and scornful apostle of a crushing, iron-shod despair, or else the libidinous laureate of a pack of satyrs.’ And now let all good citizens return to their homes and contemplate the blessings of freedom,

slowly broadening down
from precedent to precedent.

The geese, wise after the event, obediently hissed in chorus. Mr. Punch, for example, did not fail to call Swinburne ‘Mr. Swineborne’. But it was unnecessary. The Capitol, like Balaam, had been saved by a harsher voice than theirs.

Let us for a moment remind ourselves, by illustration, of the schoolboy, with feverish carnality, reading his

Lemprière, alternately in the bottomless pit and the bagnio. Here, from 'Faustine', for example, is the voice from the pit:

The die rang sideways as it fell,
 Rang cracked and thin,
 Like a man's laughter heard in hell
 Far down, Faustine,

or from 'The Garden of Proserpine':

Then star nor sun shall waken,
 Nor any change of light:
 Nor sound of waters shaken,
 Nor any sound or sight:
 Nor wintry leaves nor vernal,
 Nor days nor things diurnal;
 Only the sleep eternal
 In an eternal night.

Or here, from 'Before Dawn', the stale reek of the bagnio in:

As, when late larks give warning
 Of dying lights and dawning
 Night murmurs to the morning,
 'Lie still, O love, lie still'.
 And half her dark limbs cover
 The white limbs of her lover,
 With amorous plumes that hover
 And fervent lips that chill.

Or this, from 'Before the Mirror':

White rose in red rose-garden
 Is not so white;
 Snowdrops that plead for pardon
 And pine for fright,
 Because the hard East blows
 Over their maiden rows,
 Grow not as this face grows
 From pale to bright.

What in all this could have moved the cool Puritan to frenzy, what could have so blinded one of the first critical intellects of his time? It was not, we may conjecture, the mere impact of beauty in a new form. *Atalanta in Calydon*, no less terrible with wings, had not provoked the avenger. Nor, indeed, need we assume that either beauty or novelty as such would necessarily have disturbed Morley. It must have been the quality of the beauty and the nature of the novelty. On these points Morley is himself only an indifferent guide, because I do not believe that he ever diagnosed his own instinctive act of repulsion. He dwelt on carnality and despair: he gave the note to the pack that went yelping 'fleshly school' to the delirious harkaways of Buchanan. But the Morley who could understand and brilliantly interpret Voltaire was not the man to be scared by human oddities, even if they took the form of Bacchic revels. It was something deeper, something subconscious, that shook the incorruptible to his sea-green depths. It was a voice crying, as the voice of Demos cried in that magnificent epic of Mr. Robert Nichols: 'Give us Freedom or give us Death.' Morley was one of that

persecuting school of liberators, who, imposing on populous souls the solitude in their own, call it freedom. Freedom for Morley was dictated from without by the wise, the temperate, the middle-aged: for Swinburne it was the freedom of youth asserted from within by youth for youth. And Morley, in violently rejecting the new faith, spoke not only for himself, but for himself as typifying what was hardest and most deep-seated in the spiritual outlook of the mid-Victorians.

Nor, if we compel ourselves to be just, shall we deny that not only Swinburne's matter, but his method, were in the last degree provoking. Goliath, looking down upon his minute adversary, observed the little creature to be shaken with emotion, which, to his fury, upon investigation turned out to be the throes of ribald laughter. This David almost missed his target because he could hardly hold the sling for laughing. It is bad enough to be attacked by a pigmy; it is death to be ridiculed by one.

There was, therefore, good reason why the Victorian world should fiercely repel and resist Swinburne. The Victorians preached authority and, perhaps, practised obedience, but they cannot be supposed to have enjoyed it. They took their pleasures sadly, because they were not their true pleasures; unlike the sinners in *Hudibras*, they damned the sins they had a mind to because they dared none other. When Swinburne released their inhibitions they fell upon him, in part at least, because he had the insolence to confess to all that world of passion that, being men, they privately desired, and being Victorians they publicly repudiated.

It must be admitted that Swinburne seemed to have explored that world to the edge and beyond. He was

young enough to be dazzled by the fantastic names of old tawdry sins, and to invest them with a new innocent brightness. Not without some reason had Morley girded at him for his interest 'in the practices of the great island of the Aegean, in the habits of Messalina, of Faustina, of Pasiphae'. He wrote with the strange ignorant gravity of a child of Hermaphroditus, of Sappho, of all that glittered and darkened in the wildest legend of Greece and Rome. He wrote of these things, but they were for him decorations at the side of the page, flourishes at the end of the sentence. They were not at his heart, nor he at theirs. They had, indeed, exactly that quality of meditative passion, which Mr. Clarke has so beautifully translated into form in his illustrations. This was so obvious, even so pathetically obvious, that Morley's critical instinct could only have been misled, as it was, by a sectarian fury. He saw a boy revelling over the dirty passages of *Lemprière*, when what was in fact presented to his eyes was a boy changing *Lemprière* into a Book of Hours. The pitch, which he so youthfully handled, slid through his fingers, leaving behind only a little aureate stain to mark the place where it had suffered transmutation into the gold of a boy's genius.

The effect of Swinburne on the verse of his time may be measured by the lightning that he attracted. It is only a Keats or a Swinburne who can convulse a generation with a couplet. What, then, apart from the challenge to the accepted faiths of the age, was Swinburne's memorable contribution to the history of English verse? If he be considered first from the merely technical point of view, it is obvious that he did no less than invent a new form as different from all that had preceded it as an iambic from a hexameter. His secret, as it seems to me, is in part that

of the line that rhymes with itself first, and then, by anticipation, with its fellow. The individual line swings so perfectly to so divine a fall that the ear can rest content with it alone, hearing word chime with word, as a bell with a bell. Consider:

Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world
has grown grey from thy breath.

It moves, it mounts, it sinks so that at the end the ear is almost fulfilled. And yet 'Galilean' carries in its arms, like the new moon the old, the shadow of 'Lethean' and 'breath' of 'death' in the following line. For each line adds to its own sufficiency the hint of an intolerable completeness. Here, of course, was the seed of that empty sweetness which was later to muffle the bright speed of youth. But at first, in its superb strength and ease, the movement was almost poetry in itself. Added to the movement was a mastery in rhyming that has, I think, no equal in English. Rhyme by its mere difficulty sometimes misleads even great poets, but rhymes waited on Swinburne like courtiers seeking to catch the eye of a king. He rhymed, as a great orator speaks, giving his audience confidence not in him but in themselves. There is no need to wait on Swinburne's rhymes: they come before the swallow dares. As witness:

Till the slow sea rise and the sheer cliff crumble;
Till terrace and meadow the deep gulf drink,
Till the strength of the waves of the high tides humble
The fields that lessen, the rocks that shrink,

Here now in his triumph where all things falter
 Stretched out on the spoils that his own hand spread,
 As a god self-slain on his own strange altar,
 Death lies dead.

This is taken from the second volume of the *Poems and Ballads*, published in 1878—seven years later than *Songs before Sunrise*, and twelve years after the first series. But it exhibits the faultless satisfactions of absolute rhyme. If ever the word inevitable could be defended in its application to verse, it could, perhaps, be defended here.

I have suggested that Swinburne was never at the mercy of his rhymes, but I have not said that he was always master of his movement. He was not. He carried Tennyson one step further along the path which ends in a failure to distinguish between the utterly dissimilar arts of music and verse. Swinburne's movement, I said, was at times almost a poem in itself. I did not add the painful truth that at times it was for that reason no poem at all, but a wavering fetch that looked, sounded, but never tasted like a poem, because it was disembodied and unshareable. It bore then the same relation to a true poem that a dream does to waking. A dream belongs only to the dreamer, and has no body of shared life. A movement-poem belongs only to the poet, and has no birth in the reader's mind. This was Swinburne's danger from the outset. He called up a storm of words with wings, but his thought could not always ride it. His verse, even at its most unshareable, never lost the pulse of wings, but only too often it was wings beating to no end, a mad splendour of migration from no man's land to no god's heaven.

But that was later. For the moment in *Poems and Ballads*

he made suddenly and completely a new form which corresponded exactly to the shape of his thought. His mind moved not with sharp points, nor with grave investigating breadth. It foamed in easy ripples like a sleepy sea, or surged in piled breakers like the sea awakened. It did not pause by the way to ask why the waves either slipped or swept upon the iron shores, nor questioned the shores themselves. It was enough to rejoice in the strength of the wave, the pull of the moon, the long sweep, the rush, and the death in foam. Others could question. Swinburne moved.

It is for that reason that even his form left so small a mark on English verse. It was a lyrical completion and extension of Tennyson, but it was carried to the end. When Swinburne had written the last of the poems and ballads, the form was exhausted. He had ended, not begun, an epoch. He was at the end of an epoch, but by fulfilling, at any rate temporarily, the old measures, he left the page virgin for the next new chapter. The poets who immediately succeeded him were conscious that the old vein was exhausted, and, according to their inspiration and ability, attempted modes as far removed from the Swinburnian as possible. In the 'Nineties there were reactionary experiments with the old French forms, as with Austin Dobson and Edmund Gosse. There was an attempt with Dowson and Symons to strip the romance from the Swinburne metres, and keep what they conceived to be the hard sensual core. Finally, the two real young poets of the period—W. B. Yeats and Walter Ramal—each after his kind evolved the form of renunciation and withdrawal. The low subdued rhythms of Yeats in their elusive taciturnities, no less than the felicitous omissions of De la Mare, were the beginning of the new world of verse.

Swinburne was in no sense their master, but at least they recognized that he had conquered the old world. Young Alexanders, they had to create their own new worlds for conquest.

As with his form, so with his thought, Swinburne looked back rather than forward. In *Atalanta in Calydon* and *Erechtheus*—those two great Hellenistic plays—he revealed his spiritual affinity and origins. He was a Greek at soul, not a Hellene, but an Alexandrine, adding to the sharp classic astringency the perfumes and exotic wealth of an unrestrained sun. He could most beautifully subdue his spirit to his model, as in the severe dialogues of *Erechtheus*. But all the time the hounds of spring in his hot heart were on the traces of that lost lovely winter. He was a troubadour singing in the Greek tongue his snatches of the later South. That aspect in him could hardly be expected to influence the generation that followed him. Nor could, in fact, the romantic revolt which he led, because the conditions he challenged were passing at the moment of his assault. Or it is, perhaps, truer to say that his attack was delivered between 1860 and 1878 on a very narrow front. He broke through it with the first blind rush, but he never extended his front. The rest of his life was spent in consolidating the territory he had won. He withdrew from the world, and long before he died the land that he had gained was far behind the fighting front.

Here, too, he must therefore be regarded as essentially a part of the Victorian age. He spoke in the full accent of the Victorians, copiously and with assurance. If Tennyson celebrated bloodless virtue and emaciated beauty in *The Idylls of the King* at inordinate length, Swinburne replied with a *Laus Veneris* that in one sense may be alleged to

have echoed through all the volumes of his lyrical verse. Like all the Victorians, he affirmed, though Morley pretended to believe that he denied. The older Tennyson affirmed the advantages of simple faith, and his coronet never overshadowed his kind heart. Browning asserted that God was in His heaven. Swinburne replied that the name of God was Beauty, and Freedom. He was not a genuine thinker like Browning, nor did he, like Tennyson, attempt to understand the problems of the age. But one thing he did know. There was still a place in the dark industrial world for song, dictated neither by fear nor flattery, but owing allegiance only to the first cause of song—youth crying in the first flush of life and the passion of life:

Help us for thy free love's sake to be free,
True for thy truth's sake, for thy strength's sake strong,
Till very liberty make clean and fair
The nursing earth as the sepulchral sea.

Those who came after had their own problems and their own difficulties. The 'Nineties represented the period of lethargy after great activity. They were tired of adventures in the grand manner. They were despondently draining the lees of the century. Industrialism, after assuming one disguise after another, had finally revealed itself to them as a dull, dreary, but omnipotent devil. Their response was not, like Swinburne, to shake a fist, but to throw up hands stained yellow with excessive smoking of cigarettes. They were, in fact, between the dead world of Victoria and the unborn world of George. Swinburne was just as much a part of the irrecoverable as Tennyson.

They looked back to him with faint discomfort, and in so far as they reacted to him at all, reacted away. But they did not look forward at all. The heralds of the new world—De la Mare, Yeats, and A. E. Housman—were in their midst. But faint refusal of everything was the god of the moment, and Oscar Wilde was his prophet. A belt of sterility and tedium divided Swinburne from the re-birth at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. He had hardly affected that intervening period. He could not reach across it to the new.

For our time, therefore, Swinburne may definitely be regarded as belonging to the past, and, perhaps, of all considerable poets, the one whose influence on the age that succeeded him was the least. His life (so brilliantly recorded by Mr. Earle Welby) is in part the explanation of that, but, as I have attempted to show, the quality of his work, and the time of his appearance, were factors at least as important. But his influence does not matter. It is to his work that we must look, now that he has taken his place among the constellations.

I said at the beginning of this Preface that I was an unsatisfactory critic of Swinburne because I had loved *Poems and Ballads* too well, and came upon the later work too late. For me, therefore, Swinburne remains the poet of that first splendid uprush, of the two great Greek plays, and of a few poems scattered through *Songs before Sunrise*, and the later *Poems and Ballads*. I cannot bring myself (much as I should wish it) to believe with Mr. Welby that the plays take rank with these. I ask myself, on the contrary, whether, if Swinburne had only written the plays, he would be remembered and be a great poet. I am forced to reply that in my belief the answer is 'No'.

But if the question is, whether, having written *Poems and Ballads* and the Greek plays, he is a great poet, the answer is indubitable. He has authority, he sings, and he has the poet's last loneliness—Kipling's 'loneliness of wings'. I have compared the movement of his mind and his verse to that of water. It is not a fanciful comparison. He moved with that mixture of lightness and firmness which is the essence of a wave. If sometimes the tide comes in too slowly, if often it seeks and finds no shore, or only some small sequestered cove, it is still the tide. It still comes from far, has strength, and brings some secret from the seas below the charmed and magic casements. And over the seas at his great moments are still white wings, such wings that, hereafter or now, he will be a proud poet who can cry with truth to Swinburne in his own enchanted phrase:

When I had wings, my brother,
Such wings as thine were mine.

I had written this Preface before I had seen Mr. Clarke's illustrations. It will be noticed that Mr. Clarke presents an interpretation of Swinburne completely opposed to mine. With what I should conceive students of drawing would admit was distinguished ability he develops in more than one picture that side of the poet which I have suggested was only boyish delight in something rich and strange. The women that Mr. Clarke has drawn are fair, not 'in the fearless old fashion', but with

The shameless nameless love that makes
Hell's iron gin
Shut on you like a trap that breaks.

They have known 'sterile growths of sexless root' and
the wild obscene
Small serpents.

It is, of course, a possible interpretation, and still a widely accepted one. But it has produced the result that the argument of the Preface is directly contradicted by the illustrator. I regret that, owing to my negligence in not asking to see the drawings in advance, this volume contains two opposed views of the meaning of Swinburne's work. I owe an apology to Messrs. Lane and Mr. Clarke, but, unless I had explained this, I should have owed a still more serious apology to any readers of the volume.

HUMBERT WOLFE

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
FAUSTINE	I
THE MASQUE OF QUEEN BERSABE	8
THE LEPER	25
SAPPHICS	32
THE TWO DREAMS (<i>from Boccaccio</i>)	36
AHOLIBAH	50
AFTER DEATH	56
AT PARTING	59
THE WITCH-MOTHER	60
THE WEARY WEDDING	63
TRANSLATIONS FROM THE FRENCH OF VILLON:	
THE COMPLAINT OF THE FAIR ARMOURESS	73
HERMAPHRODITUS	77
A BALLAD OF LIFE	80
A BALLAD OF DEATH	83
LAUS VENERIS	87
LES NOYADES	104
ANACTORIA	108
FRAGOLETTA	118
ST. DOROTHY	121
SATIA TE SANGUINE	137
THE GARDEN OF PROSERPINE	140

	<i>Page</i>
LOVE AT SEA	144
FÉLISE	146
A BALLAD OF BURDENS	157
ROCOCO	160
TRANSLATIONS FROM THE FRENCH OF VILLON:	
A DOUBLE BALLAD OF GOOD COUNSEL	163
THE EPITAPH IN FORM OF A BALLAD	165
THE TRIUMPH OF TIME	167
ITYLUS	182
HYMN TO PROSERPINE	185
DOLORES	192
HESPERIA	208
DEDICATION	214

ILLUSTRATIONS

FÉLISE	<i>Frontispiece</i>
FAUSTINE	<i>facing page 2</i>
THE MASQUE OF QUEEN BERSABE	
(<i>Double page</i>)	<i>between pages 14 & 15</i>
THE LEPER	<i>facing page 26</i>
THE WEARY WEDDING	66
THE COMPLAINT OF THE FAIR	
ARMOURESS	74
ST. DOROTHY	126
SATIA TE SANGUINE	138
HYMN TO PROSERPINE	186
HESPERIA	210

SELECTED POEMS OF
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

FAUSTINE

Ave Faustina Imperatrix, morituri te salutant

LEAN back, and get some minutes' peace;
 Let your head lean
 Back to the shoulder with its fleece
 Of locks, Faustine.

The shapely silver shoulder stoops,
 Weighed over clean
 With state of splendid hair that droops
 Each side, Faustine.

Let me go over your good gifts
 That crown you queen;
 A queen whose kingdom ebbs and shifts
 Each week, Faustine.

Bright heavy brows well gathered up:
 White gloss and sheen;
 Carved lips that make my lips a cup
 To drink, Faustine,

Wine and rank poison, milk and blood,
 Being mixed therein
 Since first the devil threw dice with God
 For you, Faustine.

Your naked new-born soul, their stake,
 Stood blind between;

God said 'let him that wins her take
And keep Faustine.'

But this time Satan throve, no doubt;
Long since, I ween,
God's part in you was battered out;
Long since, Faustine.

The die rang sideways as it fell,
Rang cracked and thin,
Like a man's laughter heard in hell
Far down, Faustine,

A shadow of laughter like a sigh,
Dead sorrow's kin;
So rang, thrown down, the devil's die
That won Faustine.

A suckling of his breed you were,
One hard to wean;
But God, who lost you, left you fair,
We see, Faustine.

You have the face that suits a woman
For her soul's screen—
The sort of beauty that's called human
In hell, Faustine.

You could do all things but be good
Or chaste of mien;
And that you would not if you could,
We know, Faustine.



Faustine



Even he who cast seven devils out
 Of Magdalene
 Could hardly do as much, I doubt,
 For you, Faustine.

Did Satan make you to spite God?
 Or did God mean
 To scourge with scorpions for a rod
 Our sins, Faustine?

I know what queen at first you were,
 As though I had seen
 Red gold and black imperious hair
 Twice crown Faustine.

As if your fed sarcophagus
 Spared flesh and skin,
 You come back face to face with us,
 The same Faustine.

She loved the games men played with death,
 Where death must win;
 As though the slain man's blood and breath
 Revived Faustine.

Nets caught the pike, pikes tore the net;
 Lithe limbs and lean
 From drained-out pores dripped thick red sweat
 To soothe Faustine.

She drank the steaming drift and dust
 Blown off the scene;

Blood could not ease the bitter lust
That galled Faustine.

All round the foul fat furrows reeked,
Where blood sank in;
The circus splashed and seethed and shrieked
All round Faustine.

But these are gone now: years entomb
The dust and din;
Yea, even the bath's fierce reek and fume
That slew Faustine.

Was life worth living then? and now
Is life worth sin?
Where are the imperial years? and how
Are you, Faustine?

Your soul forgot her joys, forgot
Her times of teen;
Yea, this life likewise will you not
Forget, Faustine?

For in the time we know not of
Did fate begin
Weaving the web of days that wove
Your doom, Faustine.

The threads were wet with wine, and all
Were smooth to spin;
They wove you like a Bacchanal,
The first Faustine.

And Bacchus cast your mates and you
 Wild grapes to glean;
 Your flower-like lips were dashed with dew
 From his, Faustine.

Your drenched loose hands were stretched to hold
 The vine's wet green,
 Long ere they coined in Roman gold
 Your face, Faustine.

Then after change of soaring feather
 And winnowing fin,
 You woke in weeks of feverish weather,
 A new Faustine.

A star upon your birthday burned,
 Whose fierce serene
 Red pulseless planet never yearned
 In heaven, Faustine.

Stray breaths of Sapphic song that blew
 Through Mitylene
 Shook the fierce quivering blood in you
 By night, Faustine.

The shameless nameless love that makes
 Hell's iron gin
 Shut on you like a trap that breaks
 The soul, Faustine.

And when your veins were void and dead,
 What ghosts unclean

Swarmed round the straitened barren bed
That hid Faustine?

What sterile growths of sexless root
Or epicene?
What flower of kisses without fruit
Of love, Faustine?

What adders came to shed their coats?
What coiled obscene
Small serpents with soft stretching throats
Caressed Faustine?

But the time came of famished hours,
Maimed loves and mean,
This ghastly thin-faced time of ours,
To spoil Faustine.

You seem a thing that hinges hold,
A love-machine
With clockwork joints of supple gold—
No more, Faustine.

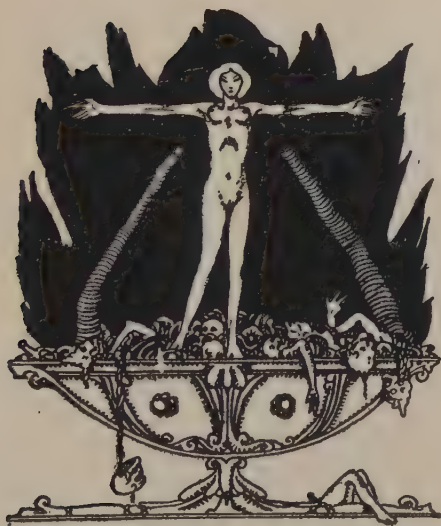
Not godless, for you serve one God,
The Lampsacene,
Who metes the gardens with his rod;
Your lord, Faustine.

If one should love you with real love
(Such things have been,
Things your fair face knows nothing of,
It seems, Faustine);

That clear hair heavily bound back,
 The lights wherein
 Shift from dead blue to burnt-up black;
 Your throat, Faustine,

Strong, heavy, throwing out the face
 And hard bright chin
 And shameful scornful lips that grace
 Their shame, Faustine,

Curled lips, long since half kissed away,
 Still sweet and keen;
 You'd give him—poison shall we say?
 Or what, Faustine?



THE MASQUE OF QUEEN BERSABE

A MIRACLE-PLAY

KING DAVID

KNIGHTS mine, all that be in hall,
I have a counsel to you all,
Because of this thing God lets fall

Among us for a sign.

For some days hence as I did eat
From kingly dishes my good meat,
There flew a bird between my feet

As red as any wine.

This bird had a long bill of red
And a gold ring above his head;
Long time he sat and nothing said,
Put softly down his neck and fed

From the gilt patens fine:

And as I marvelled, at the last
He shut his two keen eyen fast
And suddenly woxe big and brast
Ere one should tell to nine.

PRIMUS MILES

Sir, note this that I will say;
That Lord who maketh corn with hay
And morrows each of yesterday,
He hath you in his hand.

SECUNDUS MILES (*Paganus quidam*)

By Satan I hold no such thing;
 For if wine swell within a king
 Whose ears for drink are hot and ring,
 The same shall dream of wine-bibbing
 Whilst he can lie or stand.

QUEEN BERSABE

Peace now, lords, for Godis head,
 Ye chirk as starlings that be fed
 And gape as fishes newly dead;
 The devil put your bones to bed,
 Lo, this is all to say.

SECUNDUS MILES

By Mahound, lords, I have good will
 This devil's bird to wring and spill;
 For now meseems our game goes ill,
 Ye have scant hearts to play.

TERTIUS MILES

Lo, sirs, this word is there said,
 That Urias the knight is dead
 Through some ill craft; by Poulis head,
 I doubt his blood hath made so red
 This bird that flew from the queen's bed
 Whereof ye have such fear.

KING DAVID

Yea, my good knave, and is it said
 That I can raise men from the dead?

By God I think to have his head
Who saith words of my lady's bed
For any thief to hear.

Et percutiat eum in capite.

QUEEN BERSABE

I wis men shall spit at me,
And say, it were but right for thee
That one should hang thee on a tree;
Ho! it were a fair thing to see
The big stones bruise her false body;
Fie! who shall see her dead?

KING DAVID

I rede you have no fear of this,
For, as ye wot, the first good kiss
I had must be the last of his;
Now are ye queen of mine, I wis,
And lady of a house that is
Full rich of meat and bread.

PRIMUS MILES

I bid you make good cheer to be
So fair a queen as all men see.
And hold us for your lieges free;
By Peter's soul that hath the key,
Ye have good hap of it.

SECUNDUS MILES

I would that he were hanged and dead
Who hath no joy to see your head

With gold about it, barred on red;
 I hold him as a sow of lead
 That is so scant of wit.

Tunc dicat NATHAN *propheta*

O king, I have a word to thee;
 The child that is in Bersabe
 Shall wither without light to see;
 This word is come of God by me
 For sin that ye have done.

Because herein ye did not right,
 To take the fair one lamb to smite
 That was of Urias the knight;

Ye wist he had but one.
 Full many sheep I wot ye had,
 And many women, when ye bade,
 To do your will and keep you glad,
 And a good crown about your head

With gold to show thereon.
 This Urias had one poor house
 With low-barred latoun shot-windows
 And scant of corn to fill a mouse;
 And rusty basnets for his brows,

To wear them to the bone.
 Yea the roofs also, as men sain,
 Were thin to hold against the rain;
 Therefore what rushes were there lain
 Grew wet withouten foot of men;
 The stancheons were all gone in twain

As sick man's flesh is gone.
 Nathless he had great joy to see

The long hair of this Bersabe
 Fall round her lap and round her knee
 Even to her small soft feet, that be
 Shod now with crimson royally
 And covered with clean gold.
 Likewise great joy he had to kiss
 Her throat, where now the scarlet is
 Against her little chin, I wis,
 That then was but cold.
 No scarlet then her kirtle had
 And little gold about it sprad;
 But her red mouth was always glad
 To kiss, albeit the eyes were sad
 With love they had to hold.

SECUNDUS MILES

How! old thief, thy wits are lame;
 To clip such it is no shame;
 I rede you in the devil's name,
 Ye come not here to make men game;
 By Termagaunt that maketh grame,
 I shall to-bete thine head.

Hic Diabolus capiat eum.

This knave hath sharp fingers, perfay;
 Mahound you thank and keep alway,
 And give you good knees to pray;
 What man hath no lust to play,
 The devil wring his ears, I say;
 There is no more but wellaway,
 For now am I dead.

KING DAVID

Certes his mouth is wried and black,
Full little pence be in his sack;
This devil hath him by the back,
It is no boot to lie.

NATHAN

Sitteth now still and learn of me;
A little while and ye shall see
The face of God's strength presently
All queens made as this Bersabe,
All that were fair and foul ye be.
Come hither; it am I.
Et hîc omnes cantabunt.

HERODIAS

I am the queen Herodias.
This headband of my temples was
King Herod's gold band woven me;
This broken dry staff in my hand
Was the queen's staff of a great land
Betwixen Perse and Samarie.
For that one dancing of my feet,
The fire is come in my green wheat,
From one sea to the other sea.

AHOLIBAH

I am the queen Aholibah.
My lips kissed dumb the word of *Ah*
Sighed on strange lips grown sick thereby.





Marc Chagall, 1932

My face was like a place of lights
 With multitudes at festival.
 The glory of my gracious brows
 Was like God's house made glorious
 With colours upon either wall.
 Between my brows and hair there was
 A white space like a space of glass
 With golden candles over all.

AHOLAH

I am the queen of Amalek.
 There was no tender touch or fleck
 To spoil my body or bared feet.
 My words were soft like dulcimers,
 And the first sweet of grape-flowers
 Made each side of my bosom sweet.
 My raiment was as tender fruit
 Whose rind smells sweet of spice-tree root,
 Bruised balm-blossom and budded wheat.

AHINOAM

I am the Queen Ahinoam.
 Like the throat of a soft slain lamb
 Was my throat, softer veined than his:
 My lips were as two grapes the sun
 Lays his whole weight of heat upon
 Like a mouth heavy with a kiss:
 My hair's pure purple a wrought fleece,
 My temples therein as a piece
 Of a pomegranate's cleaving is.

ATARAH

I am the queen Sidonian.
 My face made faint the face of man,
 And strength was bound between my brows,
 Spikenard was hidden in my ships,
 Honey and wheat and myrrh in strips,
 White wools that shine as colour does,
 Soft linen dyed upon the fold,
 Split spice and cores of scented gold,
 Cedar and broken calamus.

SEMIRAMIS

I am the queen Semiramis.
 The whole world and the sea that is
 In fashion like a chrysopras,
 The noise of all men labouring,
 The priest's mouth tired through thanksgiving,
 The sound of love in the blood's pause,
 The strength of love in the blood's beat,
 All these were cast beneath my feet
 And all found lesser than I was.

HESIONE

I am the queen Hesione.
 The seasons that increased in me
 Made my face fairer than all men's
 I had the summer in my hair;
 And all the pale gold autumn air
 Was as the habit of my sense.
 My body was as fire that shone;
 God's beauty that makes all things one
 Was one among my handmaidens.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

I am the queen of Samothrace.
 God, making roses, made my face
 As a rose filled up full with red.
 My prow made sharp the straitened seas
 From Pontus to that Chersonese
 Whereon the ebbd Asian stream is shed.
 My hair was as sweet scent that drips;
 Love's breath begun about my lips
 Kindled the lips of people dead.

THOMYRIS

I am the queen of Scythians.
 My strength was like no strength of man's,
 My face like day, my breast like spring.
 My fame was felt in the extreme land
 That hath sunshine on the one hand
 And on the other star-shining.
 Yea, and the wind there fails of breath;
 Yea, and there life is waste like death;
 Yea, and there death is a glad thing.

HARHAS

I am the queen of Anakim.
 In the spent years whose speech is dim,
 Whose raiment is the dust and death,
 My stately body without stain
 Shone as the shining race of rain
 Whose hair a great wind scattereth.
 Now hath God turned my lips to sighs,

Plucked off mine eyelids from mine eyes,
And sealed with seals my way of breath.

MYRRHA

I am the queen Arabian.
The tears wherewith mine eyelids ran
 Smelt like my perfumed eyelids' smell
A harsh thirst made my soft mouth hard,
That ached with kisses afterward;
 My brain rang like a beaten bell.
As tears on eyes, as fire on wood,
Sin fed upon my breath and blood,
 Sin made my breasts subside and swell.

PASIPHAE

I am the queen Pasiphae.
Not all the pure clean-coloured sea
 Could cleanse or cool my yearning veins;
Nor any root nor herb that grew,
Flag-leaves that let green water through,
 Nor washing of the dews and rains.
From shame's pressed core I wrung the sweet
Fruit's savour that was death to eat,
 Whereof no seed but death remains.

SAPPHO

I am the queen of Lesbians.
My love, that had no part in man's,
 Was sweeter than all shape of sweet.
The intolerable infinite desire
Made my face pale like faded fire

When the ashen pyre falls through with heat.
 My blood was hot wan wine of love,
 And my song's sound the sound thereof,
 The sound of the delight of it.

MESSALINA

I am the queen of Italy.
 These were the signs God set on me;
 A barren beauty subtle and sleek,
 Curled carven hair, and cheeks worn wan
 With fierce false lips of many a man,
 Large temples where the blood ran weak,
 A mouth athirst and amorous
 And hungering as the grave's mouth does
 That, being an-hungred, cannot speak.

AMESTRIS

I am the queen of Persians.
 My breasts were lordlier than bright swans,
 My body as amber fair and thin.
 Strange flesh was given my lips for bread,
 With poisonous hours my days were fed,
 And my feet shod with adder-skin.
 In Shushan toward Ecbatane
 I wrought my joys with tears and pain,
 My loves with blood and bitter sin.

EPHRATH

I am the queen of Rephaim.
 God, that some while refraineth him,
 Made in the end a spoil of me.

My rumour was upon the world
 As strong sound of swoln water hurled
 Through porches of the straining sea
 My hair was like the flag-flower,
 And my breasts carven goodlier
 Than beryl with chalcedony.

PASITHEA

I am the queen of Cypriotes.
 Mine oarsmen, labouring with brown throats
 Sang of me many a tender thing.
 My maidens, girdled loose and braced
 With gold from bosom to white waist,
 Praised me between their wool-combing.
 All that praise Venus all night long
 With lips like speech and lids like song
 Praised me till song lost heart to sing.

ALACIEL

I am the queen Alaciel.
 My mouth was like that moist gold cell
 Whereout the thickest honey drips.
 Mine eyes were as a grey-green sea;
 The amorous blood that smote on me
 Smote to my feet and finger-tips.
 My throat was whiter than the dove,
 Mine eyelids as the seals of love,
 And as the doors of love my lips

ERIGONE

I am the queen Erigone.

The wild wine shed as blood on me
 Made my face brighter than a bride's.
 My large lips had the old thirst of earth,
 Mine arms the might of the old sea's girth
 Bound round the whole world's iron sides.
 Within mine eyes and in mine ears
 Were music and the wine of tears,
 And light, and thunder of the tides.

Et hinc exeant, et dicat Bersabe regina:

Alas, God, for thy great pity
 And for the might that is in thee,
 Behold, I woful Bersabe
 Cry out with stoopings of my knee
 And thy wrath laid and bound on me
 Till I may see thy love.
 Behold, Lord, this child is grown
 Within me between bone and bone
 To make me mother of a son,
 Made of my body with strong moan;
 There shall not be another one
 That shall be made hereof.

KING DAVID

Lord God, alas, what shall I sain?
 Lo, thou art as an hundred men
 Both to break and build again:
 The wild ways thou makest plain,
 Thine hands hold the hail and rain,
 And thy fingers both grape and grain;
 Of their largess we be all well fain,
 And of their great pity:

The sun thou madest of good gold,
 Of clean silver the moon cold,
 All the great stars thou hast told
 As thy cattle in thy fold
 Every one by his name of old;
 Wind and water thou hast in hold,
 Both the land and the long sea;
 Both the green sea and the land,
 Lord God, thou hast in hand,
 Both white water and grey sand;
 Upon thy right or thy left hand
 There is no man that may stand;

 Lord, thou rue on me.
 O wise Lord, if thou be keen
 To note things amiss that been,
 I am not worth a shell of bean
 More than an old mare meagre and lean;
 For all my wrong-doing with my queen,
 It grew not of our heartès clean,

 But it began of her body.
 For it fell in the hot May
 I stood within a paven way
 Built of fair bright stone, perfay,
 That is as fire of night and day
 And lighteth all my house.
 Therein be neither stones nor sticks,
 Neither red nor white bricks,
 But for cubits five or six
 There is most goodly sardonix
 And amber laid in rows.
 It goes round about my roofs,
 (If ye list ye shall have proofs)

There is good space for horse and hoofs,
 Plain and nothing perilous.

For the fair green weather's heat,
 And for the smell of leavès sweet,
 It is no marvel, well ye weet,

A man to waxen amorous.

This I say now by my case
 That spied forth of that royal place;
 There I saw in no great space
 Mine own sweet, both body and face,
 Under the fresh boughs.

In a water that was there
 She wesshe her goodly body bare
 And dried it with her owen hair:
 Both her arms and her knees fair,

Both bosom and brows;

Both shoulders and eke thighs
 Tho she wesshe upon this wise;
 Ever she sighed with little sighs,

And ever she gave God thank.

Yea, God wot I can well see yet
 Both her breast and her sides all wet
 And her long hair withouten let
 Spread sideways like a drawing net;
 Full dear bought and full far fet
 Was that sweet thing there y-set;
 It were a hard thing to forget
 How both lips and eyen met,

Breast and breath sank.

So goodly a sight as there she was,
 Lying looking on her glass

By wan water in green grass,
 Yet saw never man.
 So soft and great she was and bright
 With all her body waxen white,
 I woxe nigh blind to see the light
 Shed out of it to left and right;
 This bitter sin from that sweet sight
 Between us twain began.

NATHAN

Now, sir, be merry anon,
 For ye shall have a full wise son,
 Goodly and great of flesh and bone;
 There shall no king be such an one,
 I swear by Godis rood.
 Therefore, lord, be merry here,
 And go to meat withouten fear,
 And hear a mass with goodly cheer;
 For to all folk ye shall be dear,
 And all folk of your blood.

Et tunc dicant Laudamus



THE LEPER

NOTHING is better, I well think,
 Than love; the hidden well-water
 Is not so delicate to drink:
 This was well seen of me and her.

I served her in a royal house;
 I served her wine and curious meat.
 For will to kiss between her brows,
 I had no heart to sleep or eat.

Mere scorn God knows she had of me,
 A poor scribe, nowise great or fair,
 Who plucked his clerk's hood back to see
 Her curled-up lips and amorous hair.

I vex my head with thinking this.
 Yea, though God always hated me,
 And hates me now that I can kiss
 Her eyes, plait up her hair to see

How she then wore it on the brows,
 Yet am I glad to have her dead
 Here in this wretched wattled house
 Where I can kiss her eyes and head.

Nothing is better, I well know,
 Than love; no amber in cold sea
 Or gathered berries under snow:
 That is well seen of her and me.

Three thoughts I make my pleasure of:
 First I take heart and think of this:
 That knight's gold hair she chose to love,
 His mouth she had such will to kiss.

Then I remember that sundawn
 I brought him by a privy way
 Out at her lattice, and thereon
 What gracious words she found to say.

(Cold rushes for such little feet—
 Both feet could lie into my hand.
 A marvel was it of my sweet
 Her upright body could so stand.)

'Sweet friend, God give you thank and grace;
 Now am I clean and whole of shame,
 Nor shall men burn me in the face
 For my sweet fault that scandals them.'

I tell you over word by word.
 She, sitting edgewise on her bed,
 Holding her feet, said thus. The third,
 A sweeter thing than these, I said.

God, that makes time and ruins it
 And alters not, abiding God,
 Changed with disease her body sweet,
 The body of love wherein she abode. .

Love is more sweet and comelier
 Than a dove's throat strained out to sing.



All they spat out and cursed at her
And cast her forth for a base thing.

They cursed her, seeing how God had wrought
This curse to plague her, a curse of his.
Fools were they surely, seeing not
How sweeter than all sweet she is.

He that had held her by the hair,
With kissing lips blinding her eyes,
Felt her bright bosom, strained and bare,
Sigh under him, with short mad cries

Out of her throat and sobbing mouth
And body broken up with love,
With sweet hot tears his lips were loth
Her own should taste the savour of,

Yea, he inside whose grasp all night
Her fervent body leapt or lay,
Stained with sharp kisses red and white,
Found her a plague to spurn away.

I hid her in this wattled house,
I served her water and poor bread.
For joy to kiss between her brows
Time upon time I was nigh dead.

Bread failed; we got but well-water
And gathered grass with dropping seed.
I had such joy of kissing her,
I had small care to sleep or feed.

Sometimes when service made me glad
 The sharp tears leapt between my lids,
 Falling on her, such joy I had
 To do the service God forbids.

‘I pray you let me be at peace,
 Get hence, make room for me to die.’
 She said that: her poor lip would cease,
 Put up to mine, and turn to cry.

I said, ‘Bethink yourself how love
 Fared in us twain, what either did;
 Shall I unclothe my soul thereof?
 That I should do this, God forbid.’

Yea, though God hateth us, he knows
 That hardly in a little thing
 Love faileth of the work it does
 Till it grow ripe for gathering.

Six months, and now my sweet is dead
 A trouble takes me; I know not
 If all were done well, all well said,
 No word or tender deed forgot.

Too sweet, for the least part in her,
 To have shed life out by fragments; yet,
 Could the close mouth catch breath and stir,
 I might see something I forget.

Six months, and I sit still and hold
 In two cold palms her cold two feet.

Her hair, half grey, half ruined gold,
Thrills me and burns me in kissing it.

Love bites and stings me through, to see
Her keen face made of sunken bones.
Her worn-off eyelids madden me,
That were shot through with purple once.

She said, 'Be good with me; I grow
So tired for shame's sake, I shall die
If you say nothing': even so.
And she is dead now, and shame put by.

Yea, and the scorn she had of me
In the old time, doubtless vexed her then.
I never should have kissed her. See
What fools God's anger makes of men!

She might have loved me a little too,
Had I been humbler for her sake.
But that new shame could make love new
She saw not—yet her shame did make.

I took too much upon my love,
Having for such mean service done
Her beauty and all the ways thereof,
Her face and all the sweet thereon.

Yea, all this while I tended her,
I know the old love held fast his part:
I know the old scorn waxed heavier,
Mixed with sad wonder, in her heart.

It may be all my love went wrong—
 A scribe's work writ awry and blurred,
 Scrawled after the blind evensong—
 Spoilt music with no perfect word.

But surely I would fain have done
 All things the best I could. Perchance
 Because I failed, came short of one,
 She kept at heart that other man's.

I am grown blind with all these things:
 It may be now she hath in sight
 Some better knowledge; still there clings
 The old question. Will not God do right?¹



¹ En ce temps-là estoit dans ce pays grand nombre de ladres et de meseaulx, ce dont le roy eut grand desplaisir, veu que Dieu dust en estre moult griefvement courroucé. Ores il advint qu'une noble damoyselle appelée Yolande de Sallières estant atteinte et toustes guastée de ce vilain mal, tous ses amys et ses parens ayant devant leurs yeux la paour de Dieu la firent issir fors de leurs maisons et

oncques ne voulurent recepvoir ni reconforter chose mauldiète de Dieu et à tous les hommes puante et abhominable. Ceste dame avoyt esté moult belle et gracieuse de formes, et de son corps elle estoyt large et de vie lascive. Pourtant nul des amans qui l'avoyent souventesfois accollée et baisée moult tendrement ne voulust plus héberger si laide femme et si détestable pescheresse. Ung seul clerc qui feut premièrement son lacquays et son entremetteur en matière d'amour la reçut chez luy et la récéla dans une petite cabane. Là mourut la meschinette de grande misère et de male mort: et après elle décéda ledist clerc qui pour grand amour l'avoyt six mois durant soignée, lavée, habillée et deshabillée tous les jours de ses mains propres. Mesme dist-on que ce meschant homme et mauldièt clerc se remémourant de la grande beauté passée et guastée de ceste femme se délectoyt maintesfois à la baiser sur sa bouche orde et lépreuse et l'accoller doucement de ses mains amoureuses. Aussy est-il mort de ceste mesme maladie abhominable. Cecy advint près Fontaine-bellant en Gastinois. Et quand ouyt le roy Philippe ceste adventure moult en estoyt esmerveillé.

Grandes Chroniques de France, 1505.



SAPPHICS

ALL the night sleep came not upon my eyelids,
 Shed not dew, nor shook nor unclosed a feather,
 Yet with lips shut close and with eyes of iron
 Stood and beheld me.

Then to me so lying awake a vision
 Came without sleep over the seas and touched me,
 Softly touched mine eyelids and lips; and I too,
 Full of the vision,

Saw the white implacable Aphrodite,
 Saw the hair unbound and the feet unsandalled
 Shine as fire of sunset on western waters;
 Saw the reluctant

Feet, the straining plumes of the doves that drew her,
 Looking always, looking with necks reverted,
 Back to Lesbos, back to the hills whereunder
 Shone Mitylene;

Heard the flying feet of the Loves behind her
 Make a sudden thunder upon the waters,
 As the thunder flung from the strong unclosing
 Wings of a great wind.

So the goddess fled from her place, with awful
 Sound of feet and thunder of wings around her;
 While behind a clamour of singing women
 Severed the twilight.

Ah the singing, ah the delight, the passion!
 All the Loves wept, listening; sick with anguish,
 Stood the crowned nine Muses about Apollo;
 Fear was upon them,

While the tenth sang wonderful things they knew not.
 Ah the tenth, the Lesbian! the nine were silent,
 None endured the sound of her song for weeping;
 Laurel by laurel,

Faded all their crowns; but about her forehead,
 Round her woven tresses and ashen temples
 White as dead snow, paler than grass in summer,
 Ravaged with kisses,

Shone a light of fire as a crown for ever.
 Yea, almost the implacable Aphrodite
 Paused, and almost wept; such a song was that song,
 Yea, by her name too

Called her, saying 'Turn to me, O my Sappho';
 Yet she turned her face from the Loves, she saw not
 Tears for laughter darken immortal eyelids,
 Heard not about her

Fearful fitful wings of the doves departing,
 Saw not how the bosom of Aphrodite
 Shook with weeping, saw not her shaken raiment,
 Saw not her hands wrung;

Saw the Lesbians kissing across their smitten
 Lutes with lips more sweet than the sound of lute-strings,

Mouth to mouth and hand upon hand, her chosen,
Fairer than all men;

Only saw the beautiful lips and fingers,
Full of songs and kisses and little whispers,
Full of music; only beheld among them
Soar, as a bird soars

Newly fledged, her visible song, a marvel,
Made of perfect sound and exceeding passion,
Sweetly shapen, terrible, full of thunders,
Clothed with the wind's wings.

Then rejoiced she, laughing with love, and scattered
Roses, awful roses of holy blossom;
Then the Loves thronged sadly with hidden faces
Round Aphrodite,

Then the Muses, stricken at heart, were silent;
Yea, the gods waxed pale; such a song was that song.
All reluctant, all with a fresh repulsion,
Fled from before her.

All withdrew long since, and the land was barren,
Full of fruitless women and music only.
Now perchance, when winds are assuaged at sunset,
Lulled at the dewfall,

By the grey sea-side, unassuaged, unheard of,
Unbeloved, unseen in the ebb of twilight,
Ghosts of outcast women return lamenting,
Purged not in Lethe,

Clothed about with flame and with tears, and singing
Songs that move the heart of the shaken heaven,
Songs that break the heart of the earth with pity,
Hearing, to hear them.



THE TWO DREAMS

(FROM BOCCACCIO)

I WILL that if I say a heavy thing
 Your tongues forgive me; seeing ye know that spring
 Has flecks and fits of pain to keep her sweet,
 And walks somewhile with winter-bitten feet.
 Moreover it sounds often well to let
 One string, when ye play music, keep at fret
 The whole song through; one petal that is dead
 Confirms the roses, be they white or red;
 Dead sorrow is not sorrowful to hear
 As the thick noise that breaks mid weeping were;
 The sick sound aching in a lifted throat
 Turns to sharp silver of a perfect note;
 And though the rain falls often, and with rain
 Late autumn falls on the old red leaves like pain,
 I deem that God is not disquieted.
 Also while men are fed with wine and bread,
 They shall be fed with sorrow at his hand.

There grew a rose-garden in Florence land
 More fair than many; all red summers through
 The leaves smelt sweet and sharp of rain, and blew
 Sideways with tender wind; and therein fell
 Sweet sound wherewith the green waxed audible,
 As a bird's will to sing disturbed his throat
 And set the sharp wings forward like a boat
 Pushed through soft water, moving his brown side
 Smooth-shapen as a maid's, and shook with pride
 His deep warm bosom, till the heavy sun's
 Set face of heat stopped all the songs at once.

The ways were clean to walk and delicate;
 And when the windy white of March grew late,
 Before the trees took heart to face the sun
 With ravelled raiment of lean winter on,
 The roots were thick and hot with hollow grass.

Some roods away a lordly house there was,
 Cool with broad courts and latticed passage wet
 From rush-flowers and lilies ripe to set,
 Sown close among the strewings of the floor;
 And either wall of the slow corridor
 Was dim with deep device of gracious things;
 Some angel's steady mouth and weight of wings
 Shut to the side; or Peter with straight stole
 And beard cut black against the aureole
 That spanned his head from nape to crown; thereby
 Mary's gold hair, thick to the girdle-tie
 Wherein was bound a child with tender feet;
 Or the broad cross with blood nigh brown on it.

Within this house a righteous lord abode,
 Ser Averardo; patient of his mood,
 And just of judgment; and to child he had
 A maid so sweet that her mere sight made glad
 Men sorrowing, and unbound the brows of hate;
 And where she came, the lips that pain made strait
 Waxed warm and wide, and from untender grew
 Tender as those that sleep brings patience to.
 Such long locks had she, that with knee to chin
 She might have wrapped and warmed her feet therein.
 Right seldom fell her face on weeping wise;
 Gold hair she had, and golden-coloured eyes,
 Filled with clear light and fire and large repose
 Like a fair hound's; no man there is but knows

Her face was white, and thereto she was tall;
 In no wise lacked there any praise at all
 To her most perfect and pure maidenhood;
 No sin I think there was in all her blood.

She, where a gold grate shut the roses in,
 Dwelt daily through deep summer weeks, through green
 Hushed hours of rain upon the leaves; and there
 Love made him room and space to worship her
 With tender worship of bowed knees, and wrought
 Such pleasure as the pained sense palates not
 For weariness, but at one taste undoes
 The heart of its strong sweet, is ravenous
 Of all the hidden honey; words and sense
 Fail through the tune's imperious prevalence.

In a poor house this lover kept apart,
 Long communing with patience next his heart
 If love of his might move that face at all,
 Tuned evenwise with colours musical;
 Then after length of days he said thus: 'Love,
 For love's own sake and for the love thereof
 Let no harsh words untune your gracious mood;
 For good it were, if anything be good,
 To comfort me in this pain's plague of mine;
 Seeing thus, how neither sleep nor bread nor wine
 Seems pleasant to me, yea no thing that is
 Seems pleasant to me; only I know this,
 Love's ways are sharp for palms of piteous feet
 To travel, but the end of such is sweet:
 Now do with me as seemeth you the best.'
 She mused a little, as one holds his guest
 By the hand musing, with her face borne down:
 Then said: 'Yea, though such bitter seed be sown,

Have no more care of all that you have said;
 Since if there is no sleep will bind your head,
 Lo, I am fain to help you certainly;
 Christ knoweth, sir, if I would have you die;
 There is no pleasure when a man is dead.' ¹
 Thereat he kissed her hands and yellow head
 And clipped her fair long body many times;
 I have no wit to shape in written rhymes
 A scanted tithe of this great joy they had.

They were too near love's secret to be glad;
 As whoso deems the core will surely melt
 From the warm fruit his lips caress, hath felt
 Some bitter kernel where the teeth shut hard:
 Or as sweet music sharpens afterward,
 Being half disrelished both for sharp and sweet;
 As sea-water, having killed over-heat
 In a man's body, chills it with faint ache;
 So their sense, burdened only for love's sake,
 Failed for pure love; yet so time served their wit,
 They saved each day some gold reserves of it,
 Being wiser in love's riddle than such be
 Whom fragments feed with his chance charity.
 All things felt sweet were felt sweet overmuch;
 The rose-thorn's prickles dangerous to touch,
 And flecks of fire in the thin leaf-shadows;
 Too keen the breathèd honey of the rose,
 Its red too harsh a weight on feasted eyes;
 They were so far gone in love's histories,
 Beyond all shape and colour and mere breath,
 Where pleasure has for kinsfolk sleep and death,
 And strength of soul and body waxen blind
 For weariness, and flesh entailed with mind,

When the keen edge of sense foretasteth sin.

Even this green place the summer caught them in
 Seemed half deflowered and sick with beaten leaves
 In their strayed eyes; these gold flower-fumèd eves
 Burnt out to make the sun's love-offering,
 The midnight's prayer, the rose's thanksgiving,
 The trees' weight burdening the strengthless air,
 The shape of her stilled eyes, her coloured hair,
 Her body's balance from the moving feet—
 All this, found fair, lacked yet one grain of sweet
 It had some warm weeks back: so perisheth
 On May's new lip the tender April breath:
 So those same walks the wind sowed lilies in
 All April through, and all their latter kin
 Of languid leaves whereon the Autumn blows—
 The dead red raiment of the last year's rose—
 The last year's laurel, and the last year's love,
 Fade, and grow things that death grows weary of.

What man will gather in red summer-time
 The fruit of some obscure and hoary rhyme
 Heard last midwinter, taste the heart in it,
 Mould the smooth semitones afresh, refit
 The fair limbs ruined, flush the dead blood through
 With colour, make all broken beauties new
 For love's new lesson—shall not such find pain
 When the marred music labouring in his brain
 Frets him with sweet sharp fragments, and lets slip
 One word that might leave satisfied his lip—
 One touch that might put fire in all the chords?
 This was her pain: to miss from all sweet words
 Some taste of sound, diverse and delicate—
 Some speech the old love found out to compensate

For seasons of shut lips and drowsiness—
 Some grace, some word the old love found out to bless
 Passionless months and undelighted weeks.
 The flowers had lost their summer-scented cheeks,
 Their lips were no more sweet than daily breath:
 The year was plagued with instances of death.

So fell it, these were sitting in cool grass
 With leaves about, and many a bird there was
 Where the green shadow thickliest impleached
 Soft fruit and writhen spray and blossom bleached
 Dry in the sun or washed with rains to white:
 Her girdle was pure silk, the bosom bright
 With purple as purple water and gold wrought in.
 One branch had touched with dusk her lips and chin,
 Made violet of the throat, abashed with shade
 The breast's bright plaited work: but nothing frayed
 The sun's large kiss on the luxurious hair.
 Her beauty was new colour to the air
 And music to the silent many birds.
 Love was an-hungred for some perfect words
 To praise her with; but only her low name
 'Andrevuola' came thrice, and thrice put shame
 In her clear cheek, so fruitful with new red
 That for pure love straightway shame's self was dead.

Then with lids gathered as who late had wept
 She began saying: 'I have so little slept
 My lids drowse now against the very sun;
 Yea, the brain aching with a dream begun
 Beats like a fitful blood; kiss but both brows,
 And you shall pluck my thoughts grown dangerous
 Almost away.' He said thus, kissing them:
 'O sole sweet thing that God is glad to name,

My one gold gift, if dreams be sharp and sore
 Shall not the waking time increase much more
 With taste and sound, sweet eyesight or sweet scent?
 Has any heat too hard and insolent
 Burnt bare the tender married leaves, undone
 The maiden grass shut under from the sun?
 Where in this world is room enough for pain?’

The feverish finger of love had touched again
 Her lips with happier blood; the pain lay meek
 In her fair face, nor altered lip nor cheek
 With pallor or with pulse; but in her mouth
 Love thirsted as a man wayfaring doth,
 Making it humble as weak hunger is.
 She lay close to him, bade do this and this,
 Say that, sing thus: then almost weeping-ripe
 Crouched, then laughed low. As one that fain would wipe
 The old record out of old things done and dead,
 She rose, she heaved her hands up, and waxed red
 For wilful heart and blameless fear of blame;
 Saying ‘Though my wits be weak, this is no shame
 For a poor maid whom love so punisheth
 With heats of hesitation and stopped breath
 That with my dreams I live yet heavily
 For pure sad heart and faith’s humility.
 Now be not wroth and I will show you this.

‘Methought our lips upon their second kiss
 Met in this place, and a fair day we had
 And fair soft leaves that waxed and were not sad
 With shaken rain or bitten through with drouth;
 When I, beholding ever how your mouth
 Waited for mine, the throat being fallen back,
 Saw crawl thereout a live thing flaked with black

Specks of brute slime and leper-coloured scale,
 A devil's hide with foul flame-writhen grail
 Fashioned where hell's heat festers loathsomest;
 And that brief speech may ease me of the rest,
 Thus were you slain and eaten of the thing.
 My waked eyes felt the new day shuddering
 On their low lids, felt the whole east so beat,
 Pant with close pulse of such a plague-struck heat,
 As if the palpitating dawn drew breath
 For horror, breathing between life and death,
 Till the sun sprang blood-bright and violent.'

So finishing, her soft strength wholly spent,
 She gazed each way, lest some brute-hoovèd thing,
 The timeless travail of hell's childbearing,
 Should threat upon the sudden: whereat he,
 For relish of her tasted misery
 And tender little thornprick of her pain,
 Laughed with mere love. What lover among men
 But hath his sense fed sovereignly 'twixt whiles
 With tears and covered eyelids and sick smiles
 And soft disaster of a painèd face?
 What pain, established in so sweet a place,
 But the plucked leaf of it smells fragrantly?
 What colour burning man's wide-open eye
 But may be pleurably seen? what sense
 Keeps in its hot sharp extreme violence
 No savour of sweet things? The bereaved blood
 And emptied flesh in their most broken mood
 Fail not so wholly, famish not when thus
 Past honey keeps the starved lip covetous.

Therefore this speech from a glad mouth began,
 Breathed in her tender hair and temples wan

Like one prolonged kiss while the lips had breath.
 'Sleep, that abides in vassalage of death
 And in death's service wears out half his age,
 Hath his dreams full of deadly vassalage,
 Shadow and sound of things ungracious;
 Fair shallow faces, hooded bloodless brows,
 And mouths past kissing; yea, myself have had
 As harsh a dream as holds your eyelids sad.

'This dream I tell you came three nights ago;
 In full mid sleep I took a whim to know
 How sweet things might be; so I turned and thought;
 But save my dream all sweet availed me not.
 First came a smell of pounded spice and scent
 Such as God ripens in some continent
 Of utmost amber in the Syrian sea;
 And breaths as though some costly rose could be
 Spoiled slowly, wasted by some bitter fire
 To burn the sweet out leaf by leaf, and tire
 The flower's poor heart with heat and waste, to make
 Strong magic for some perfumed woman's sake.
 Then a cool naked sense beneath my feet
 Of bud and blossom; and sound of veins that beat
 As if a lute should play of its own heart
 And fearfully, not smitten of either part;
 And all my blood it filled with sharp and sweet
 As gold swoln grain fills out the huskèd wheat;
 So I rose naked from the bed, and stood
 Counting the mobile measure in my blood
 Some pleasant while, and through each limb there came
 Swift little pleasures pungent as a flame,
 Felt in the thrilling flesh and veins as much
 As the outer curls that feel the comb's first touch

Thrill to the roots and shiver as from fire;
 And blind between my dream and my desire
 I seemed to stand and held my spirit still
 Lest this should cease. A child whose fingers spill
 Honey from cells forgotten of the bee
 Is less afraid to stir the hive and see
 Some wasp's bright back inside, than I to feel
 Some finger-touch disturb the flesh like steel.
 I prayed thus: Let me catch a secret here
 So sweet, it sharpens the sweet taste of fear
 And takes the mouth with edge of wine; I would
 Have here some colour and smooth shape as good
 As those in heaven whom the chief garden hides
 With low grape-blossom veiling their white sides
 And lesser tendrils that so bind and blind
 Their eyes and feet, that if one come behind
 To touch their hair they see not, neither fly;
 This would I see in heaven and not die.
 So praying, I had nigh cried out and knelt,
 So wholly my prayer filled me: till I felt
 In the dumb night's warm weight of glowing gloom
 Somewhat that altered all my sleeping-room,
 And made it like a green low place wherein
 Maids mix to bathe: one sets her small warm chin
 Against a ripple, that the angry pearl
 May flow like flame about her: the next curl
 Dips in some eddy coloured of the sun
 To wash the dust well out; another one
 Holds a straight ankle in her hand and swings
 With lavish body sidelong, so that rings
 Of sweet fierce water, swollen and splendid, fail
 All round her fine and floated body pale,

Swayed flower-fashion, and her balanced side
 Swerved edgeways lets the weight of water slide,
 As taken in some underflow of sea
 Swerves the banked gold of sea-flowers; but she
 Pulls down some branch to keep her perfect head
 Clear of the river; even from wall to bed,
 I tell you, was my room transfigured so.
 Sweet, green and warm it was, nor could one know
 If there were walls or leaves, or if there was
 No bed's green curtain, but mere gentle grass.
 There were set also hard against the feet
 Gold plates with honey and green grapes to eat,
 With the cool water's noise to hear in rhymes:
 And a wind warmed me full of furze and limes
 And all hot sweets the heavy summer fills
 To the round brim of smooth cup-shapen hills.
 Next the grave walking of a woman's feet
 Made my veins hesitate, and gracious heat
 Made thick the lids and leaden on mine eyes:
 And I thought ever, surely it were wise
 Not yet to see her: this may last (who knows?)
 Five minutes; the poor rose is twice a rose
 Because it turns a face to her, the wind
 Sings that way; hath this woman ever sinned,
 I wonder? as a boy with apple-rind,
 I played with pleasures, made them to my mind,
 Changed each ere tasting. When she came indeed,
 First her hair touched me, then I grew to feed
 On the sense of her hand; her mouth at last
 Touched me between the cheek and lip and past
 Over my face with kisses here and there
 Sown in and out across the eyes and hair.

Still I said nothing; till she set her face
 More close and harder on the kissing-place,
 And her mouth caught like a snake's mouth, and stung
 So faint and tenderly, the fang scarce clung
 More than a bird's foot: yet a wound it grew,
 A great one, let this red mark witness you
 Under the left breast; and the stroke thereof
 So clove my sense that I woke out of love
 And knew not what this dream was nor had wit;
 But now God knows if I have skill of it.'

Hereat she laid one palm against her lips
 To stop their trembling; as when water slips
 Out of a beak-mouthed vessel with faint noise
 And chuckles in the narrowed throat and cloyes
 The carven rims with murmuring, so came
 Words in her lips with no word right of them.
 A beaten speech thick and disconsolate,
 Till his smile ceasing waxed compassionate
 Of her sore fear that grew from anything—
 The sound of the strong summer thickening
 In heated leaves of the smooth apple-trees:
 The day's breath felt about the ash-branches,
 And noises of the noon whose weight still grew
 On the hot heavy-headed flowers, and drew
 Their red mouths open till the rose-heart ached;
 For eastward all the crowding rose was slaked
 And soothed with shade: but westward all its growth
 Seemed to breathe hard with heat as a man doth
 Who feels his temples newly feverous.
 And even with such motion in her brows
 As that man hath in whom sick days begin,
 She turned her throat and spake, her voice being thin

As a sick man's, sudden and tremulous:
 'Sweet, if this end be come indeed on us,
 Let us love more'; and held his mouth with hers.
 As the first sound of flooded hill-waters
 Is heard by people of the meadow-grass,
 Or ever a wandering waif of ruin pass
 With whirling stones and foam of the brown stream
 Flaked with fierce yellow: so beholding him
 She felt before tears came her eyelids wet,
 Saw the face deadly thin where life was yet,
 Heard his throat's harsh last moan before it clomb:
 And he, with close mouth passionate and dumb,
 Burned at her lips: so lay they without speech,
 Each grasping other, and the eyes of each
 Fed in the other's face: till suddenly
 He cried out with a little broken cry
 This word, 'O help me, sweet, I am but dead.'
 And even so saying, the colour of fair red
 Was gone out of his face, and his blood's beat
 Fell, and stark death made sharp his upward feet
 And pointed hands: and without moan he died.
 Pain smote her sudden in the brows and side,
 Strained her lips open and made burn her eyes:
 For the pure sharpness of her miseries
 She had no heart's pain, but mere body's wrack;
 But at the last her beaten blood drew back
 Slowly upon her face, and her stunned brows
 Suddenly grown aware and piteous
 Gathered themselves, her eyes shone, her hard breath
 Came as though one nigh dead came back from death;
 Her lips throbbed, and life trembled through her hair.
 And in brief while she thought to bury there

The dead man that her love might lie with him
 In a sweet bed under the rose-roots dim
 And soft earth round the branchèd apple-trees,
 Full of hushed heat and heavy with great ease,
 And no man entering divide him thence.
 Wherefore she bade one of her handmaidens
 To be her help to do upon this wise.
 And saying so the tears out of her eyes
 Fell without noise and comforted her heart:
 Yea, her great pain eased of the sorest part
 Began to soften in her sense of it.
 There under all the little branches sweet
 The place was shapen of his burial;
 They shed thereon no thing funereal,
 But coloured leaves of latter rose-blossom,
 Stems of soft grass, some withered red and some
 Fair and fresh-blooded; and spoil splendor
 Of marigold and great spent sunflower.

And afterward she came back without word
 To her own house; two days went, and the third
 Went, and she showed her father of this thing.
 And for great grief of her soul's travailing
 He gave consent she should endure in peace
 Till her life's end; yea, till her time should cease,
 She should abide in fellowship of pain.
 And having lived a holy year or twain
 She died of pure waste heart and weariness.
 And for love's honour in her love's distress
 This word was written over her tomb's head:
 'Here dead she lieth, for whose sake Love is dead.'

AHOLIBAH

IN the beginning God made thee
 A woman well to look upon,
 Thy tender body as a tree
 Whereon cool wind hath always blown
 Till the clean branches be well grown.

There was none like thee in the land;
 The girls that were thy bondwomen
 Did bind thee with a purple band
 Upon thy forehead, that all men
 Should know thee for God's handmaiden.

Strange raiment clad thee like a bride,
 With silk to wear on hands and feet
 And plates of gold on either side:
 Wine made thee glad, and thou didst eat
 Honey, and choice of pleasant meat.

And fishers in the middle sea
 Did get thee sea-fish and sea-weeds
 In colour like the robes on thee;
 And curious work of plaited reeds,
 And wools wherein live purple bleeds.

And round the edges of thy cup
 Men wrought thee marvels out of gold,
 Strong snakes with lean throats lifted up,
 Large eyes whereon the brows had hold,
 And scaly things their slime kept cold.

For thee they blew soft wind in flutes
 And ground sweet roots for cunning scent;
 Made slow because of many lutes,
 The wind among thy chambers went
 Wherein no light was violent.

God called thy name Aholibah,
 His tabernacle being in thee,
 A witness through waste Asia;
 Thou wert a tent sewn cunningly
 With gold and colours of the sea.

God gave thee gracious ministers
 And all their work who plait and weave:
 The cunning of embroiderers
 That sew the pillow to the sleeve,
 And likeness of all things that live.

Thy garments upon thee were fair
 With scarlet and with yellow thread;
 Also the weaving of thine hair
 Was as fine gold upon thy head,
 And thy silk shoes were sewn with red.

All sweet things he bade sift, and ground
 As a man grindeth wheat in mills
 With strong wheels alway going round;
 He gave thee corn, and grass that fills
 The cattle on a thousand hills.

The wine of many seasons fed
 Thy mouth, and made it fair and clean;

Sweet oil was poured out on thy head
 And ran down like cool rain between
 The strait close locks it melted in.

The strong men and the captains knew
 Thy chambers wrought and fashionèd
 With gold and covering of blue,
 And the blue raiment of thine head
 Who satest on a stately bed.

All these had on their garments wrought
 The shape of beasts and creeping things.
 The body that availeth not,
 Flat backs of worms and veined wings,
 And the lewd bulk that sleeps and stings.

Also the chosen of the years,
 The multitude being at ease,
 With sackbuts and with dulcimers
 And noise of shawms and psalteries
 Made mirth within the ears of these.

But as a common woman doth,
 Thou didst think evil and devise;
 The sweet smell of thy breast and mouth
 Thou madest as the harlot's wise,
 And there was painting on thine eyes.

Yea, in the woven guest-chamber
 And by the painted passages
 Where the strange gracious paintings were,

State upon state of companies,
There came on thee the lust of these.

Because of shapes on either wall
Sea-coloured from some rare blue shell
At many a Tyrian interval,
Horsemen on horses, girdled well,
Delicate and desirable,

Thou saidest: I am sick of love:
Stay me with flagons, comfort me
With apples for my pain thereof
Till my hands gather in his tree
That fruit wherein my lips would be.

Yea, saidest thou, I will go up
When there is no more shade than one
May cover with a hollow cup,
And make my bed against the sun
Till my blood's violence be done.

Thy mouth was leant upon the wall
Against the painted mouth, thy chin
Touched the hair's painted curve and fall;
Thy deep throat, fallen lax and thin,
Worked as the blood's beat worked therein.

Therefore, O thou Aholibah,
God is not glad because of thee;
And thy fine gold shall pass away
Like those fair coins of ore that be
Washed over by the middle sea.

Then will one make thy body bare
 To strip it of all gracious things,
 And pluck the cover from thine hair,
 And break the gift of many kings,
 Thy wrist-rings and thine ankle-rings.

Likewise the man whose body joins
 To thy smooth body, as was said,
 Who hath a girdle on his loins
 And dyed attire upon his head—
 The same who, seeing, worshippèd,

Because thy face was like the face
 Of a clean maiden that smells sweet,
 Because thy gait was as the pace
 Of one that opens not her feet
 And is not heard within the street—

Even he, O thou Aholibah,
 Made separate from thy desire,
 Shall cut thy nose and ears away
 And bruise thee for thy body's hire
 And burn the residue with fire.

Then shall the heathen people say,
 The multitude being at ease;
 Lo, this is that Aholibah
 Whose name was blown among strange seas,
 Grown old with soft adulteries.

Also her bed was made of green,
 Her windows beautiful for glass

That she had made her bed between:
 Yea, for pure lust her body was
 Made like white summer-coloured grass.

Her raiment was a strong man's spoil;
 Upon a table by a bed
 She set mine incense and mine oil
 To be the beauty of her head
 In chambers walled about with red.

Also between the walls she had
 Fair faces of strong men portrayed;
 All girded round the loins, and clad
 With several cloths of woven braid
 And garments marvellously made.

Therefore the wrath of God shall be
 Set as a watch upon her way;
 And whoso findeth by the sea
 Blown dust of bones will hardly say
 If this were that Aholibah.



AFTER DEATH

THE four boards of the coffin lid
Heard all the dead man did.

The first curse was in his mouth,
Made of grave's mould and deadly drouth.

The next curse was in his head,
Made of God's work discomfited.

The next curse was in his hands,
Made out of two grave-bands.

The next curse was in his feet,
Made out of a grave-sheet.

'I had fair coins red and white,
And my name was as great light;

I had fair clothes green and red,
And strong gold bound round my head.

But no meat comes in my mouth,
Now I fare as the worm doth;

And no gold binds in my hair,
Now I fare as the blind fare.

My live thews were of great strength,
Now am I waxen a span's length;

My live sides were full of lust,
Now are they dried with dust.'

The first board spake and said:
'Is it best eating flesh or bread?'

The second answered it:
'Is wine or honey the more sweet?'

The third board spake and said: '
'Is red gold worth a girl's gold head?'

The fourth made answer thus:
'All these things are as one with us.'

The dead man asked of them:
'Is the green land stained brown with flame?

Have they hewn my son for beasts to eat,
And my wife's body for beasts' meat?

Have they boiled my maid in a brass pan,
And built a gallows to hang my man?'

The boards said to him:
'This is a lewd thing that ye deem.

Your wife has gotten a golden bed,
All the sheets are sewn with red.

Your son has gotten a coat of silk,
The sleeves are soft as curded milk.

Your maid has gotten a kirtle new,
All the skirt has braids of blue.

Your man has gotten both ring and glove,
Wrought well for eyes to love.'

The dead man answered thus:
'What good gift shall God give us?'

The boards answered him anon:
'Flesh to feed hell's worm upon.'



AT PARTING

FOR a day and a night Love sang to us, played with us,
 Folded us round from the dark and the light;
 And our hearts were fulfilled of the music he made with us,
 Made with our hearts and our lips while he stayed with us,
 Stayed in mid passage his pinions from flight
 For a day and a night.

From his foes that kept watch with his wings had he
 hidden us,
 Covered us close from the eyes that would smite,
 From the feet that had tracked and the tongues that had
 chidden us
 Sheltering in shade of the myrtles forbidden us,
 Spirit and flesh growing one with delight
 For a day and a night.

But his wings will not rest and his feet will not stay for us:
 Morning is here in the joy of its might;
 With his breath has he sweetened a night and a day for us;
 Now let him pass, and the myrtles make way for us;
 Love can but last in us here at his height
 For a day and a night.



THE WITCH-MOTHER

‘O WHERE will ye gang to and where will ye sleep,
Against the night begins?’

‘My bed is made wi’ cauld sorrows,
My sheets are lined wi’ sins.

‘And a sair grief sitting at my foot,
And a sair grief at my head;
And dule to lay me my laigh pillows,
And teen till I be dead.

‘And the rain is sair upon my face,
And sair upon my hair;
And the wind upon my weary mouth,
That never may man kiss mair.

‘And the snow upon my heavy lips,
That never shall drink nor eat;
And shame to cledding, and woe to wedding,
And pain to drink and meat.

‘But woe be to my bairns’ father,
And ever ill fare he:
He has tane a braw bride hame to him,
Cast out my bairns and me.’

‘And what shall they have to their marriage meat
This day they twain are wed?’

‘Meat of strong crying, salt of sad sighing,
And God restore the dead.’

‘And what shall they have to their wedding wine
 This day they twain are wed?’
 ‘Wine of weeping, and draughts of sleeping,
 And God raise up the dead.’

She ’s tane her to the wild woodside,
 Between the flood and fell:
 She ’s sought a rede against her need
 Of the fiend that bides in hell.

She ’s tane her to the wan burnside,
 She’s wrought wi’ sang and spell:
 She ’s plighted her soul for doom and dole
 To the fiend that bides in hell.

She ’s set her young son to her breast,
 Her auld son to her knee:
 Says, ‘Weel for you the night, bairnies,
 And weel the morn for me.’

She looked fu’ lang in their een, sighing,
 And sair and sair grat she:
 She has slain her young son at her breast,
 Her auld son at her knee.

She ’s sodden their flesh wi’ saft water,
 She ’s mixed their blood with wine:
 She ’s tane her to the braw bride-house,
 Where a’ were boun’ to dine.

She poured the red wine in his cup,
 And his een grew fain to greet:

She set the baked meats at his hand,
And bade him drink and eat.

Says, 'Eat your fill of your flesh, my lord,
And drink your fill of your wine;
For a' thing's yours and only yours
That has been yours and mine.'

Says, 'Drink your fill of your wine, my lord,
And eat your fill of your bread:
I would they were quick in my body again,
Or I that bare them dead.'

He struck her head frae her fair body,
And dead for grief he fell:
And there were twae mair sangs in heaven,
And twae mair sauls in hell.



THE WEARY WEDDING

O DAUGHTER, why do ye laugh and weep,
 One with another?
 For woe to wake and for will to sleep,
 Mother, my mother.

But weep ye winna the day ye wed,
 One with another.
 For tears are dry when the springs are dead,
 Mother, my mother.

Too long have your tears run down like rain,
 One with another.
 For a long love lost and a sweet love slain,
 Mother, my mother.

Too long have your tears dripped down like dew,
 One with another.
 For a knight that my sire and my brethren slew,
 Mother, my mother.

Let past things perish and dead griefs lie,
 One with another.
 O fain would I weep not, and fain would I die,
 Mother, my mother.

Fair gifts we give ye, to laugh and live,
 One with another.
 But sair and strange are the gifts I give,
 Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give for your father's love?
 One with another.
 Fruits full few and thorns enough,
 Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give for your mother's sake?
 One with another.
 Tears to brew and tares to bake,
 Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give your sister Jean?
 One with another.
 A bier to build and a babe to wean,
 Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give your sister Nell?
 One with another.
 The end of life and beginning of hell,
 Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give your sister Kate?
 One with another.
 Earth's door and hell's gate,
 Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give your brother Will?
 One with another.
 Life's grief and world's ill,
 Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give your brother Hugh?
 One with another.

A bed of turf to turn into,
Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give your brother John?
One with another.
The dust of death to feed upon,
Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give your bauld bridegroom?
One with another.
A barren bed and an empty room,
Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give your bridegroom's friend?
One with another.
A weary foot to the weary end,
Mother, my mother.

And what will ye give your blithe bridesmaid?
One with another.
Grief to sew and sorrow to braid,
Mother, my mother.

And what will ye drink the day ye're wed?
One with another.
But ae drink of the wan well-head,
Mother, my mother.

And whatten a water is that to draw?
One with another.
We maun draw thereof a', we maun drink thereof a',
Mother, my mother.

And what shall ye pu' where the well rins deep?
One with another.
Green herb of death, fine flower of sleep,
Mother, my mother.

Are there ony fishes that swim therein?
One with another.
The white fish grace, and the red fish sin,
Mother, my mother.

Are there ony birds that sing thereby?
One with another.
O when they come thither they sing till they die,
Mother, my mother.

Is there ony draw-bucket to that well-head?
One with another.
There 's a wee well-bucket hangs low by a thread,
Mother, my mother.

And whatten a thread is that to spin?
One with another.
It 's green for grace, and it 's black for sin,
Mother, my mother.

And what will ye strew on your bride-chamber floor?
One with another.
But one strewing and no more,
Mother, my mother.

And whatten a strewing shall that one be?
One with another.



The dust of earth and sand of the sea,
 Mother, my mother.

And what will ye take to build your bed?
 One with another.
 Sighing and shame and the bones of the dead,
 Mother, my mother.

And what will ye wear for your wedding gown?
 One with another.
 Grass for the green and dust for the brown,
 Mother, my mother.

And what will ye wear for your wedding lace?
 One with another.
 A heavy heart and a hidden face,
 Mother, my mother.

And what will ye wear for a wreath to your head?
 One with another.
 Ash for the white and blood for the red,
 Mother, my mother.

And what will ye wear for your wedding ring?
 One with another.
 A weary thought for a weary thing,
 Mother, my mother.

And what shall the chimes and the bell-ropes play?
 One with another.
 A weary tune on a weary day,
 Mother, my mother.

And what shall be sung for your wedding song?
 One with another.
 A weary word of a weary wrong,
 Mother, my mother.

The world's way with me runs back,
 One with another,
 Wedded in white and buried in black,
 Mother, my mother.

The world's day and the world's night,
 One with another,
 Wedded in black and buried in white,
 Mother, my mother.

The world's bliss and the world's teen,
 One with another,
 It's red for white and it's black for green,
 Mother, my mother.

The world's will and the world's way,
 One with another,
 It's sighing for night and crying for day,
 Mother, my mother.

The world's good and the world's worth,
 One with another,
 It's earth to flesh and it's flesh to earth,
 Mother, my mother.

* * * * *

When she came out at the kirkyard gate,
 (One with another)
 The bridegroom's mother was there in wait.
 (Mother, my mother.)

O mother, where is my great green bed,
 (One with another)
 Silk at the foot and gold at the head,
 Mother, my mother?

Yea, it is ready, the silk and the gold,
 One with another.
 But line it well that I lie not cold,
 Mother, my mother.

She laid her cheek to the velvet and vair,
 One with another;
 She laid her arms up under her hair.
 (Mother, my mother.)

Her gold hair fell through her arms fu' low,
 One with another:
 Lord God, bring me out of woe!
 (Mother, my mother.)

Her gold hair fell in the gay reeds green,
 One with another:
 Lord God, bring me out of teen!
 (Mother, my mother.)

* * * * *

O mother, where is my lady gone?

(One with another.)

In the bride-chamber she makes sore moan:

(Mother, my mother.)

Her hair falls over the velvet and vair,

(One with another)

Her great soft tears fall over her hair.

(Mother, my mother.)

When he came into the bride's chamber,

(One with another)

Her hands were like pale yellow amber.

(Mother, my mother.)

Her tears made specks in the velvet and vair,

(One with another)

The seeds of the reeds made specks in her hair.

(Mother, my mother.)

He kissed her under the gold on her head;

(One with another)

The lids of her eyes were like cold lead.

(Mother, my mother.)

He kissed her under the fall of her chin;

(One with another)

There was right little blood therein.

(Mother, my mother.)

He kissed her under her shoulder sweet;

(One with another)

Her throat was weak, with little heat.

(Mother, my mother.)

He kissed her down by her breast-flowers red,

One with another;

They were like river-flowers dead.

(Mother, my mother.)

What ails you now o' your weeping, wife?

(One with another.)

It ails me sair o' my very life.

(Mother, my mother.)

What ails you now o' your weary ways?

(One with another.)

It ails me sair o' my long life-days.

(Mother, my mother.)

Nay, ye are young, ye are over fair.

(One with another.)

Though I be young, what needs ye care?

(Mother, my mother.)

Nay, ye are fair, ye are over sweet.

(One with another.)

Though I be fair, what needs ye greet?

(Mother, my mother.)

Nay, ye are mine while I hold my life.

(One with another.)

O fool, will ye marry the worm for a wife?

(Mother, my mother.)

Nay, ye are mine while I have my breath
(One with another.)

O fool, will ye marry the dust of death?
(Mother, my mother.)

Yea, ye are mine, we are handfast wed,
One with another.

Nay, I am no man's; nay, I am dead,
Mother, my mother.





TRANSLATIONS FROM THE FRENCH
OF VILLON

THE COMPLAINT OF THE FAIR ARMOURESS

I

MESEEMETH I heard cry and groan
That sweet who was the armourer's maid;
For her young years she made sore moan,
And right upon this wise she said:
'Ah fierce old age with foul bald head,
To spoil fair things thou art over fain;
Who holdeth me? who? would God I were dead!
Would God I were well dead and slain!

II

'Lo, thou hast broken the sweet yoke
That my high beauty held above
All priests and clerks and merchant-folk;
There was not one but for my love
Would give me gold and gold enough,
Though sorrow his very heart had riven,
To win from me such wage thereof
As now no thief would take if given.

III

'I was right chary of the same,
God wot it was my great folly,
For love of one sly knave of them,
Good store of that same sweet had he;

For all my subtle wiles, perdie,
 God wot I loved him well enow;
 Right evilly he handled me,
 But he loved well my gold, I trow.

IV

‘Though I gat bruises green and black,
 I loved him never the less a jot;
 Though he bound burdens on my back,
 If he said “Kiss me and heed it not”,
 Right little pain I felt, God wot,
 When that foul thief’s mouth, found so sweet,
 Kissed me—Much good thereof I got!
 I keep the sin and the shame of it.

V

‘And he died thirty year ago.
 I am old now, no sweet thing to see;
 By God, though, when I think thereon,
 And of that good glad time, woe’s me,
 And stare upon my changed body
 Stark naked, that has been so sweet,
 Lean, wizen, like a small dry tree,
 I am nigh mad with the pain of it.

VI

‘Where is my faultless forehead’s white,
 The lifted eyebrows, soft gold hair,
 Eyes wide apart and keen of sight,
 With subtle skill in the amorous air;

The straight nose, great nor small, but fair,
 The small carved ears of shapeliest growth,
 Chin dimpling, colour good to wear,
 And sweet red splendid kissing mouth?

VII

'The shapely slender shoulders small,
 Long arms, hands wrought in glorious wise,
 Round little breasts, the hips withal
 High, full of flesh, not scant of size,
 Fit for all amorous masteries;

*** ***** ***, *** ** ***** ***** **

***** ***** ** ***** ***** *****

** * ***** ***** ** ***** *****?

VIII

'A writhled forehead, hair gone grey,
 Fallen eyebrows, eyes gone blind and red,
 Their laughs and looks all fled away,
 Yea, all that smote men's hearts are fled;
 The bowed nose, fallen from goodlihead;
 Foul flapping ears like water-flags;
 Peaked chin, and cheeks all waste and dead,
 And lips that are two skinny rags:

IX

'Thus endeth all the beauty of us.
 The arms made short, the hands made lean,
 The shoulders bowed and ruinous,
 The breasts, alack! all fallen in;

The flanks too, like the breasts, grown thin;

** ** ** ** ** *****' ** ** **!

For the lank thighs, no thighs but skin,
They are specked with spots like sausage-meat.

X

'So we make moan for the old sweet days,
Poor old light women, two or three
Squatting above the straw-fire's blaze,
The bosom crushed against the knee,
Like faggots on a heap we be,
Round fires soon lit, soon quenched and done;
And we were once so sweet, even we!
Thus fareth many and many an one.'



HERMAPHRODITUS

I

LIFT up thy lips, turn round, look back for love,
 Blind love that comes by night and casts out rest;
 Of all things tired thy lips look weariest,
 Save the long smile that they are wearied of.
 Ah sweet, albeit no love be sweet enough,
 Choose of two loves and cleave unto the best;
 Two loves at either blossom of thy breast
 Strive until one be under and one above.
 Their breath is fire upon the amorous air,
 Fire in thine eyes and where thy lips suspire:
 And whosoever hath seen thee, being so fair,
 Two things turn all his life and blood to fire;
 A strong desire begot on great despair,
 A great despair cast out by strong desire.

II

Where between sleep and life some brief space is,
 With love like gold bound round about the head,
 Sex to sweet sex with lips and limbs is wed,
 Turning the fruitful feud of hers and his
 To the waste wedlock of a sterile kiss;
 Yet from them something like as fire is shed
 That shall not be assuaged till death be dead,
 Though neither life nor sleep can find out this.
 Love made himself of flesh that perisheth,
 A pleasure-house for all the loves his kin;

But on the one side sat a man like death,
 And on the other a woman sat like sin.
 So with veiled eyes and sobs between his breath
 Love turned himself and would not enter in.

III

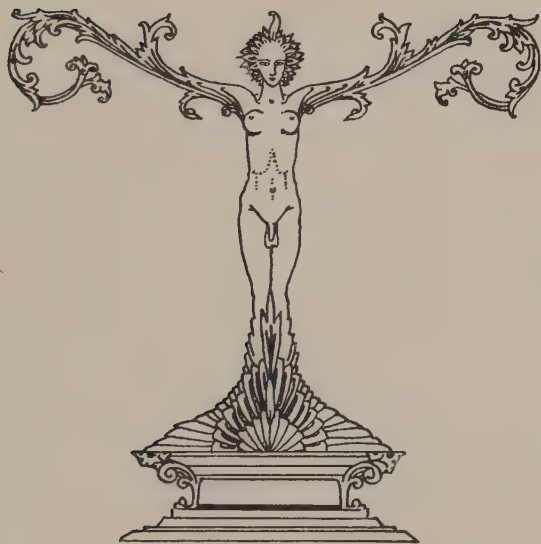
Love, is it love or sleep or shadow or light
 That lies between thine eyelids and thine eyes?
 Like a flower laid upon a flower it lies,
 Or like the night's dew laid upon the night.
 Love stands upon thy left hand and thy right,
 Yet by no sunset and by no moonrise
 Shall make thee man and ease a woman's sighs,
 Or make thee woman for a man's delight.
 To what strange end hath some strange god made fair
 The double blossom of two fruitless flowers?
 Hid love in all the folds of all thy hair,
 Fed thee on summers, watered thee with showers,
 Given all the gold that all the seasons wear
 To thee that art a thing of barren hours?

IV

Yea, love, I see; it is not love but fear.
 Nay, sweet, it is not fear but love, I know;
 Or wherefore should thy body's blossom blow
 So sweetly, or thine eyelids leave so clear
 Thy gracious eyes that never made a tear—
 Though for their love our tears like blood should flow,
 Though love and life and death should come and go,
 So dreadful, so desirable, so dear?

Yea, sweet, I know; I saw in what swift wise
 Beneath the woman's and the water's kiss
 Thy moist limbs melted into Salmacis,
 And the large light turned tender in thine eyes,
 And all thy boy's breath softened into sighs;
 But Love being blind, how should he know of this?

Au Musée du Louvre, Mars 1863.



A BALLAD OF LIFE

I FOUND in dreams a place of wind and flowers,
 Full of sweet trees and colour of glad grass,
 In midst whereof there was
 A lady clothed like summer with sweet hours.
 Her beauty, fervent as a fiery moon,
 Made my blood burn and swoon
 Like a flame rained upon.
 Sorrow had filled her shaken eyelids' blue,
 And her mouth's sad red heavy rose all through
 Seemed sad with glad things gone.

She held a little cithern by the strings,
 Shaped heartwise, strung with subtle-coloured hair
 Of some dead lute-player
 That in dead years had done delicious things.
 The seven strings were named accordingly:
 The first string charity,
 The second tenderness,
 The rest were pleasure, sorrow, sleep, and sin,
 And loving-kindness, that is pity's kin
 And is most pitiless.

There were three men with her, each garmented
 With gold and shod with gold upon the feet;
 And with plucked ears of wheat
 The first man's hair was wound upon his head:
 His face was red, and his mouth curled and sad;
 All his gold garment had
 Pale stains of dust and rust.

A riven hood was pulled across his eyes;
 The token of him being upon this wise
 Made for a sign of Lust.

The next was Shame, with hollow heavy face
 Coloured like green wood when flame kindles it;
 He hath such feeble feet
 They may not well endure in any place.
 His face was full of grey old miseries,
 And all his blood's increase
 Was even increase of pain.
 The last was Fear, that is akin to Death;
 He is Shame's friend, and always as Shame saith
 Fear answers him again.

My soul said in me: This is marvellous,
 Seeing the air's face is not so delicate
 Nor the sun's grace so great,
 If Sin and she be kin or amorous.
 And seeing where maidens served her on their knees,
 I bade one crave of these
 To know the cause thereof.
 Then Fear said: I am Pity that was dead.
 And Shame said: I am Sorrow comforted.
 And Lust said: I am Love.

Thereat her hands began a lute-playing
 And her sweet mouth a song in a strange tongue;
 And all the while she sung
 There was no sound but long tears following
 Long tears upon men's faces, waxen white
 With extreme sad delight.

But those three following men
 Became as men raised up among the dead;
 Great glad mouths open and fair cheeks made red
 With child's blood come again.

Then I said: Now assuredly I see
 My lady is perfect, and transfigureth
 All sin and sorrow and death,
 Making them fair as her own eyelids be,
 Or lips wherein my whole soul's life abides;
 Or as her sweet white sides
 And bosom carved to kiss.
 Now therefore, if her pity further me,
 Doubtless for her sake all my days shall be
 As righteous as she is.

Forth, ballad, and take roses in both arms,
 Even till the top rose touch thee in the throat
 Where the least thornprick harms;
 And girdled in thy golden singing-coat,
 Come thou before my lady and say this:
 Borgia, thy gold hair's colour burns in me,
 Thy mouth makes beat my blood in feverish rhymes;
 Therefore so many as these roses be,
 Kiss me so many times.
 Then it may be, seeing how sweet she is,
 That she will stoop herself none otherwise
 Than a blown vine-branch doth,
 And kiss thee with soft laughter on thine eyes,
 Ballad, and on thy mouth.

A BALLAD OF DEATH

KNEEL down, fair Love, and fill thyself with tears,
Girdle thyself with sighing for a girth
Upon the sides of mirth,
Cover thy lips and eyelids, let thine ears
Be filled with rumour of people sorrowing;
Make thee soft raiment out of woven sighs
Upon the flesh to cleave,
Set pains therein and many a grievous thing,
And many sorrows after each his wise
For armlet and for gorget and for sleeve.

O Love's lute heard about the lands of death,
Left hanged upon the trees that were therein;
O Love and Time and Sin,
Three singing mouths that mourn now underbreath,
Three lovers, each one evil spoken of;
O smitten lips wherethrough this voice of mine
Came softer with her praise;
Abide a little for our lady's love.
The kisses of her mouth were more than wine,
And more than peace the passage of her days.

O Love, thou knowest if she were good to see.
O Time, thou shalt not find in any land
Till, cast out of thine hand,
The sunlight and the moonlight fail from thee,
Another woman fashioned like as this.
O Sin, thou knowest that all thy shame in her
Was made a goodly thing;

Yea, she caught Shame and shamed him with her kiss,
 With her fair kiss, and lips much lovelier
 Than lips of amorous roses in late spring.

By night there stood over against my bed
 Queen Venus with a hood striped gold and black,
 Both sides drawn fully back
 From brows wherein the sad blood failed of red,
 And temples drained of purple and full of death.
 Her curled hair had the wave of sea-water
 And the sea's gold in it.
 Her eyes were as a dove's that sickeneth.
 Strewn dust of gold she had shed over her,
 And pearl and purple and amber on her feet.

Upon her raiment of dyed sendaline
 Were painted all the secret ways of love
 And covered things thereof,
 That hold delight as grape-flowers hold their wine;
 Red mouths of maidens and red feet of doves,
 And brides that kept within the bride-chamber
 Their garment of soft shame,
 And weeping faces of the wearied loves
 That swoon in sleep and awake wearier,
 With heat of lips and hair shed out like flame.

The tears that through her eyelids fell on me
 Made mine own bitter where they ran between
 As blood had fallen therein,
 She saying: Arise, lift up thine eyes and see
 If any glad thing be or any good
 Now the best thing is taken forth of us;

Even she to whom all praise
 Was as one flower in a great multitude,
 One glorious flower of many and glorious,
 One day found gracious among many days:

Even she whose handmaiden was Love—to whom
 At kissing times across her stateliest bed
 Kings bowed themselves and shed
 Pale wine, and honey with the honeycomb,
 And spikenard bruised for a burnt-offering;
 Even she between whose lips the kiss became
 As fire and frankincense;
 Whose hair was as gold raiment on a king,
 Whose eyes were as the morning purged with flame,
 Whose eyelids as sweet savour issuing thence.

Then I beheld, and lo on the other side
 My lady's likeness crowned and robed and dead.
 Sweet still, but now not red,
 Was the shut mouth whereby men lived and died.
 And sweet, but emptied of the blood's blue shade,
 The great curled eyelids that withheld her eyes.
 And sweet, but like spoilt gold,
 The weight of colour in her tresses weighed.
 And sweet, but as a vesture with new dyes,
 The body that was clothed with love of old.

Ah! that my tears filled all her woven hair
 And all the hollow bosom of her gown—
 Ah! that my tears ran down
 Even to the place where many kisses were,
 Even where her parted breast-flowers have place,

Even where they are cloven apart—who knows not this?
 Ah! the flowers cleave apart
 And their sweet fills the tender interspace;
 Ah! the leaves grown thereof were things to kiss
 Ere their fine gold was tarnished at the heart.

Ah! in the days when God did good to me,
 Each part about her was a righteous thing;
 Her mouth an almsgiving,
 The glory of her garments charity,
 The beauty of her bosom a good deed,
 In the good days when God kept sight of us;
 Love lay upon her eyes,
 And on that hair whereof the world takes heed;
 And all her body was more virtuous
 Than souls of women fashioned otherwise.

Now, ballad, gather poppies in thine hands
 And sheaves of brier and many rusted sheaves
 Rain-rotten in rank lands,
 Waste marigold and late unhappy leaves
 And grass that fades ere any of it be mown;
 And when thy bosom is filled full thereof
 Seek out Death's face ere the light altereth,
 And say 'My master that was thrall to Love
 Is become thrall to Death.'
 Bow down before him, ballad, sigh and groan.
 But make no sojourn in thy outgoing;
 For haply it may be
 That when thy feet return at evening
 Death shall come in with thee.

LAUS VENERIS

Lors dit en plourant; Hélas trop malheureux homme et mauldict pescheur, oncques ne verrai-je clémence et miséricorde de Dieu. Ores m'en irai-je d'icy et me cacherais dedans le mont Horsel, en requérant de faveur et d'amoureuse merci ma doulce dame Vénus, car pour son amour serai-je bien à tout jamais damné en enfer. Voicy la fin de tous mes faicts d'armes et de toutes mes belles chansons. Hélas, trop belle estoit la face de ma dame et ses yeulx, et en mauvais jour je vis ces chouses-là. Lors s'en alla tout en gémissant et se retourna chez elle, et là vescu tristement en grand amour près de sa dame. Puis après advint que le pape vit un jour esclater sur son baston force belles fleurs rouges et blanches et maints boutons de feuilles, et ainsi vit-il reverdir toute l'escorce. Ce dont il eut grande crainte et moult s'en esmut, et grande pitié lui prit de ce chevalier qui s'en estoit départi sans espoir comme un homme misérable et damné. Doncques envoya force messaigers devers luy pour le ramener, disant qu'il aurait de Dieu grace et bonne absolution de son grand pesché d'amour. Mais oncques plus ne le virent; car toujours demeura ce pauvre chevalier auprès de Vénus la haulte et forte déesse ès flancs de la montagne amoureuse.

*Livre des grandes merveilles d'amour, escript en latin
et en françois par Maistre Antoine Gaget. 1530.*

ASLEEP or waking is it? for her neck,
Kissed over close, wears yet a purple speck
Wherein the pained blood falters and goes out,
Soft, and stung softly—fairer for a fleck.

But though my lips shut sucking on the place,
There is no vein at work upon her face;
Her eyelids are so peaceable, no doubt
Deep sleep has warmed her blood through all its ways.

Lo, this is she that was the world's delight;
The old grey years were parcels of her might;
The strewings of the ways wherein she trod
Were the twain seasons of the day and night.

Lo, she was thus when her clear limbs enticed
All lips that now grow sad with kissing Christ,
Stained with blood fallen from the feet of God,
The feet and hands whereat our souls were priced.

Alas, Lord, surely thou art great and fair.
But lo her wonderfully woven hair!
And thou didst heal us with thy piteous kiss;
But see now, Lord; her mouth is lovelier.

She is right fair; what hath she done to thee?
Nay, fair Lord Christ, lift up thine eyes and see;
Had now thy mother such a lip—like this?
Thou knowest how sweet a thing it is to me.

Inside the Horsel here the air is hot;
Right little peace one hath for it, God wot;
The scented dusty daylight burns the air,
And my heart chokes me till I hear it not.

Behold, my Venus, my soul's body, lies
With my love laid upon her garment-wise,
Feeling my love in all her limbs and hair
And shed between her eyelids through her eyes.

She holds my heart in her sweet open hands
Hanging asleep; hard by her head there stands,

Crowned with gilt thorns and clothed with flesh like fire,
Love, wan as foam blown up the salt burnt sands—

Hot as the brackish waifs of yellow spume
That shift and steam—loose clots of arid fume
From the sea's panting mouth of dry desire;
There stands he, like one labouring at a loom.

The warp holds fast across; and every thread
That makes the woof up has dry specks of red;
Always the shuttle cleaves clean through, and he
Weaves with the hair of many a ruined head.

Love is not glad nor sorry, as I deem;
Labouring he dreams, and labours in the dream,
Till when the spool is finished, lo I see
His web, reeled off, curls and goes out like steam.

Night falls like fire; the heavy lights run low,
And as they drop, my blood and body so
Shake as the flame shakes, full of days and hours
That sleep not neither weep they as they go.

Ah yet would God this flesh of mine might be
Where air might wash and long leaves cover me,
Where tides of grass break into foam of flowers,
Or where the wind's feet shine along the sea.

Ah yet would God that stems and roots were bred
Out of my weary body and my head,
That sleep were sealed upon me with a seal,
And I were as the least of all his dead.

Would God my blood were dew to feed the grass,
 Mine ears made deaf and mine eyes blind as glass,
 My body broken as a turning wheel,
 And my mouth stricken ere it saith Alas!

Ah God, that love were as a flower or flame,
 That life were as the naming of a name,
 That death were not more pitiful than desire,
 That these things were not one thing and the same!

Behold now, surely somewhere there is death:
 For each man hath some space of years, he saith,
 A little space of time ere time expire,
 A little day, a little way of breath.

And lo, between the sundawn and the sun,
 His day's work and his night's work are undone;
 And lo, between the nightfall and the light,
 He is not, and none knoweth of such an one.

Ah God, that I were as all souls that be,
 As any herb or leaf of any tree,
 As men that toil through hours of labouring night,
 As bones of men under the deep sharp sea.

Outside it must be winter among men;
 For at the gold bars of the gates again
 I heard all night and all the hours of it
 The wind's wet wings and fingers drip with rain.

Knights gather, riding sharp for cold; I know
 The ways and woods are strangled with the snow;

And with short song the maidens spin and sit
Until Christ's birthnight, lily-like, arow.

The scent and shadow shed about me make
The very soul in all my senses ache;

The hot hard night is fed upon my breath,
And sleep beholds me from afar awake.

Alas, but surely where the hills grow deep,
Or where the wild ways of the sea are steep,
Or in strange places somewhere there is death,
And on death's face the scattered hair of sleep.

There lover-like with lips and limbs that meet
They lie, they pluck sweet fruit of life and eat;
But me the hot and hungry days devour,
And in my mouth no fruit of theirs is sweet.

No fruit of theirs, but fruit of my desire,
For her love's sake whose lips through mine respire;
Her eyelids on her eyes like flower on flower,
Mine eyelids on mine eyes like fire on fire.

So lie we, not as sleep that lies by death,
With heavy kisses and with happy breath;
Not as man lies by woman, when the bride
Laughs low for love's sake and the words he saith.

For she lies, laughing low with love; she lies
And turns his kisses on her lips to sighs,
To sighing sound of lips unsatisfied,
And the sweet tears are tender with her eyes.

Ah, not as they, but as the souls that were
 Slain in the old time, having found her fair;
 Who, sleeping with her lips upon their eyes,
 Heard sudden serpents hiss across her hair.

Their blood runs round the roots of time like rain:
 She casts them forth and gathers them again;
 With nerve and bone she weaves and multiplies
 Exceeding pleasure out of extreme pain.

Her little chambers drip with flower-like red,
 Her girdles, and the chaplets of her head,
 Her armlets and her anklets; with her feet
 She tramples all that winepress of the dead.

Her gateways smoke with fume of flowers and fires,
 With loves burnt out and unassuaged desires;
 Between her lips the steam of them is sweet,
 The languor in her ears of many lyres.

Her beds are full of perfume and sad sound,
 Her doors are made with music, and barred round
 With sighing and with laughter and with tears,
 With tears whereby strong souls of men are bound.

There is the knight Adonis that was slain;
 With flesh and blood she chains him for a chain;
 The body and the spirit in her ears
 Cry, for her lips divide him vein by vein.

Yea, all she slayeth; yea, every man save me;
 Me, love, thy lover that must cleave to thee

Till the ending of the days and ways of earth,
The shaking of the sources of the sea.

Me, most forsaken of all souls that fell;
Me, satiated with things insatiable;
Me, for whose sake the extreme hell makes mirth,
Yea, laughter kindles at the heart of hell.

Alas thy beauty! for thy mouth's sweet sake
My soul is bitter to me, my limbs quake
As water, as the flesh of men that weep,
As their heart's vein whose heart goes nigh to break.

Ah God, that sleep with flower-sweet finger-tips
Would crush the fruit of death upon my lips;
Ah God, that death would tread the grapes of sleep
And wring their juice upon me as it drips.

There is no change of cheer for many days,
But change of chimes high up in the air, that sways
Rung by the running fingers of the wind;
And singing sorrows heard on hidden ways.

Day smiteth day in twain, night sundereth night,
And on mine eyes the dark sits as the light;
Yea, Lord, thou knowest I know not, having sinned,
If heaven be clean or unclean in thy sight.

Yea, as if earth were sprinkled over me,
Such chafed harsh earth as chokes a sandy sea,
Each pore doth yearn, and the dried blood thereof
Gasps by sick fits, my heart swims heavily,

There is a feverish famine in my veins;
 Below her bosom, where a crushed grape stains
 The white and blue, there my lips caught and clove
 An hour since, and what mark of me remains?

I dare not always touch her, lest the kiss
 Leave my lips charred. Yea, Lord, a little bliss,
 Brief bitter bliss, one hath for a great sin;
 Nathless thou knowest how sweet a thing it is.

Sin, is it sin whereby men's souls are thrust
 Into the pit? yet had I a good trust
 To save my soul before it slipped therein,
 Trod under by the fire-shod feet of lust.

For if mine eyes fail and my soul takes breath,
 I look between the iron sides of death
 Into sad hell where all sweet love hath end,
 All but the pain that never finisheth.

There are the naked faces of great kings,
 The singing folk with all their lute-playings;
 There when one cometh he shall have to friend
 The grave that covets and the worm that clings.

There sit the knights that were so great of hand,
 The ladies that were queens of fair green land,
 Grown grey and black now, brought unto the dust,
 Soiled, without raiment, clad about with sand.

There is one end for all of them; they sit
 Naked and sad, they drink the dregs of it,

Trodden as grapes in the wine-press of lust,
Trampled and trodden by the fiery feet.

I see the marvellous mouth whereby there fell
Cities and people whom the gods loved well,
Yet for her sake on them the fire gat hold,
And for their sakes on her the fire of hell.

And softer than the Egyptian lote-leaf is,
The queen whose face was worth the world to kiss,
Wearing at breast a suckling snake of gold;
And large pale lips of strong Semiramis,

Curled like a tiger's that curl back to feed;
Red only where the last kiss made them bleed;
Her hair most thick with many a carven gem,
Deep in the mane, great-chested, like a steed.

Yea, with red sin the faces of them shine;
But in all these there was no sin like mine;
No, not in all the strange great sins of them
That made the wine-press froth and foam with wine.

For I was of Christ's choosing, I God's knight,
No blinkard heathen stumbling for scant light;
I can well see, for all the dusty days
Gone past, the clean great time of goodly fight.

I smell the breathing battle sharp with blows,
With shriek of shafts and snapping short of bows;
The fair pure sword smites out in subtle ways,
Sounds and long lights are shed between the rows

Of beautiful mailed men; the edged light slips,
Most like a snake that takes short breath and dips
 Sharp from the beautifully bending head,
With all its gracious body lithe as lips

That curl in touching you; right in this wise
My sword doth, seeming fire in mine own eyes,
 Leaving all colours in them brown and red
And flecked with death; then the keen breaths like sighs,

The caught-up choked dry laughter following them,
When all the fighting face is grown a flame
 For pleasure, and the pulse that stuns the ears,
And the heart's gladness of the goodly game.

Let me think yet a little; I do know
These things were sweet, but sweet such years ago,
 Their savour is all turned now into tears;
Yea, ten years since, where the blue ripples blow,

The blue curled eddies of the blowing Rhine,
I felt the sharp wind shaking grass and vine
 Touch my blood too, and sting me with delight
Through all this waste and weary body of mine

That never feels clear air; right gladly then
I rode alone, a great way off my men,
 And heard the chiming bridle smite and smite,
And gave each rhyme thereof some rhyme again,

Till my song shifted to that iron one;
Seeing there rode up between me and the sun

Some certain of my foe's men, for his three
White wolves across their painted coats did run.

The first red-bearded with square cheeks—alack,
I made my knave's blood turn his beard to black;
The slaying of him was a joy to see:
Perchance too, when at night he came not back,

Some woman fell a-weeping, whom this thief
Would beat when he had drunken; yet small grief
Hath any for the ridding of such knaves;
Yea, if one wept, I doubt her teen was brief.

This bitter love is sorrow in all lands,
Draining of eyelids, wringing of drenched hands,
Sighing of hearts and filling up of graves;
A sign across the head of the world he stands,

As one that hath a plague-mark on his brows;
Dust and spilt blood do track him to his house
Down under earth; sweet smells of lip and cheek
Like a sweet snake's breath made more poisonous

With chewing of some perfumed deadly grass,
Are shed all round his passage if he pass,
And their quenched savour leaves the whole soul weak,
Sick with keen guessing whence the perfume was.

As one who hidden in deep sedge and reeds
Smells the rare scent made where a panther feeds,
And tracking ever slotwise the warm smell
Is snapped upon by the sweet mouth and bleeds,

His head far down the hot sweet throat of her—
 So one tracks love, whose breath is deadlier,
 And lo, one springe and you are fast in hell,
 Fast as the gin's grip of a wayfarer.

I think now, as the heavy hours de cease
 One after one, and bitter thoughts increase
 One upon one, of all sweet finished things;
 The breaking of the battle; the long peace

Wherein we sat clothed softly, each man's hair
 Crowned with green leaves beneath white hoods of vair;
 The sounds of sharp spears at great tourneyings,
 And noise of singing in the late sweet air.

I sang of love too, knowing nought thereof;
 'Sweeter,' I said, 'the little laugh of love
 Than tears out of the eyes of Magdalen,
 Or any fallen feather of the Dove.

'The broken little laugh that spoils a kiss,
 The ache of purple pulses, and the bliss
 Of blinded eyelids that expand again—
 Love draws them open with those lips of his,

'Lips that cling hard till the kissed face has grown
 Of one same fire and colour with their own;
 Then ere one sleep, appeased with sacrifice,
 Where his lips wounded, there his lips atone.'

I sang these things long since and knew them not;
 'Lo, here is love, or there is love, God wot,

This man and that finds favour in his eyes,'
I said, 'but I, what guerdon have I got?

'The dust of praise that is blown everywhere
In all men's faces with the common air;
The bay-leaf that wants chafing to be sweet
Before they wind it in a singer's hair.'

So that one dawn I rode forth sorrowing;
I had no hope but of some evil thing,
And so rode slowly past the windy wheat
And past the vineyard and the water-spring,

Up to the Horsel. A great elder-tree
Held back its heaps of flowers to let me see
The ripe tall grass, and one that walked therein,
Naked, with hair shed over to the knee.

She walked between the blossom and the grass;
I knew the beauty of her, what she was,
The beauty of her body and her sin,
And in my flesh the sin of hers, alas!

Alas! for sorrow is all the end of this.
O sad kissed mouth, how sorrowful it is!
O breast whereat some suckling sorrow clings,
Red with the bitter blossom of a kiss!

Ah, with blind lips I felt for you, and found
About my neck your hands and hair enwound,
The hands that stifle and the hair that stings,
I felt them fasten sharply without sound.

Yea, for my sin I had great store of bliss:
 Rise up, make answer for me, let thy kiss
 Seal my lips hard from speaking of my sin,
 Lest one go mad to hear how sweet it is.

Yet I waxed faint with fume of barren bowers,
 And murmuring of the heavy-headed hours;
 And let the dove's beak fret and peck within
 My lips in vain, and Love shed fruitless flowers.

So that God looked upon me when your hands
 Were hot about me; yea, God brake my bands
 To save my soul alive, and I came forth
 Like a man blind and naked in strange lands

That hears men laugh and weep, and knows not whence
 Nor wherefore, but is broken in his sense;
 Howbeit I met folk riding from the north
 Towards Rome, to purge them of their souls' offence,

And rode with them, and spake to none; the day
 Stunned me like lights upon some wizard way,
 And ate like fire mine eyes and mine eyesight;
 So rode I, hearing all these chant and pray,

And marvelled; till before us rose and fell
 White cursèd hills, like outer skirts of hell
 Seen where men's eyes look through the day to night,
 Like a jagged shell's lips, harsh, untunable,

Blown in between by devils' wrangling breath;
 Nathless we won well past that hell and death,

Down to the sweet land where all airs are good,
Even unto Rome where God's grace tarrieth.

Then came each man and worshipped at his knees
Who in the Lord God's likeness bears the keys
To bind or loose, and called on Christ's shed blood,
And so the sweet-souled father gave him ease.

But when I came I fell down at his feet,
Saying, 'Father, though the Lord's blood be right sweet,
The spot it takes not off the panther's skin,
Nor shall an Ethiop's stain be bleached with it.

'Lo, I have sinned and have spat out at God,
Wherefore his hand is heavier and his rod
More sharp because of mine exceeding sin,
And all his raiment redder than bright blood

'Before mine eyes; yea, for my sake I wot
The heat of hell is waxen seven times hot
Through my great sin.' Then spake he some sweet word,
Giving me cheer; which thing availed me not;

Yea, scarce I wist if such indeed were said;
For when I ceased—lo, as one newly dead
Who hears a great cry out of hell, I heard
The crying of his voice across my head.

'Until this dry shred staff, that hath no whit
Of leaf nor bark, bear blossom and smell sweet,
Seek thou not any mercy in God's sight,
For so long shalt thou be cast out from it.'

Yea, what if dried-up stems wax red and green,
Shall that thing be which is not nor has been?

Yea, what if sapless bark wax green and white,
Shall any good fruit grow upon my sin?

Nay, though sweet fruit were plucked of a dry tree,
And though men drew sweet waters of the sea,

There should not grow sweet leaves on this dead stem,
This waste wan body and shaken soul of me.

Yea, though God search it warily enough,
There is not one sound thing in all thereof;

Though he search all my veins through, searching them
He shall find nothing whole therein but love.

For I came home right heavy, with small cheer,
And lo my love, mine own soul's heart, more dear

Than mine own soul, more beautiful than God,
Who hath my being between the hands of her—

Fair still, but fair for no man saving me,
As when she came out of the naked sea

Making the foam as fire whereon she trod,
And as the inner flower of fire was she.

Yea, she laid hold upon me, and her mouth
Clove unto mine as soul to body doth,

And, laughing, made her lips luxurious;
Her hair had smells of all the sunburnt south,

Strange spice and flower, strange savour of crushed fruit,
And perfume the swart kings tread underfoot

For pleasure when their minds wax amorous,
Charred frankincense and grated sandal-root.

And I forgot fear and all weary things,
All ended prayers and perished thanksgivings,
Feeling her face with all her eager hair
Cleave to me, clinging as a fire that clings

To the body and to the raiment, burning them;
As after death I know that such-like flame
Shall cleave to me for ever; yea, what care,
Albeit I burn then, having felt the same?

Ah love, there is no better life than this;
To have known love, how bitter a thing it is,
And afterward be cast out of God's sight;
Yea, these that know not, shall they have such bliss

High up in barren heaven before his face
As we twain in the heavy-hearted place,
Remembering love and all the dead delight,
And all that time was sweet with for a space?

For till the thunder in the trumpet be,
Soul may divide from body, but not we
One from another; I hold thee with my hand,
I let mine eyes have all their will of thee,

I seal myself upon thee with my might,
Abiding alway out of all men's sight
Until God loosen over sea and land
The thunder of the trumpets of the night.

LES NOYADES

WHATEVER a man of the sons of men
 Shall say to his heart of the lords above,
 They have shown man verily, once and again,
 Marvellous mercies and infinite love.

In the wild fifth year of the change of things,
 When France was glorious and blood-red, fair
 With dust of battle and deaths of kings,
 A queen of men, with helmeted hair,

Carrier came down to the Loire and slew,
 Till all the ways and the waves waxed red:
 Bound and drowned, slaying two by two,
 Maidens and young men, naked and wed.

They brought on a day to his judgment-place
 One rough with labour and red with fight,
 And a lady noble by name and face,
 Faultless, a maiden, wonderful, white.

She knew not, being for shame's sake blind,
 If his eyes were hot on her face hard by.
 And the judge bade strip and ship them, and bind
 Bosom to bosom, to drown and die.

The white girl winced and whitened; but he
 Caught fire, waxed bright as a great bright flame
 Seen with thunder far out on the sea,
 Laughed hard as the glad blood went and came.

Twice his lips quailed with delight, then said,
 'I have but a word to you all, one word;
 Bear with me; surely I am but dead';
 And all they laughed and mocked him and heard.

'Judge, when they open the judgment-roll,
 I will stand upright before God and pray:
 "Lord God, have mercy on one man's soul,
 For his mercy was great upon earth, I say.

"Lord, if I loved thee—Lord, if I served—
 If these who darkened thy fair Son's face
 I fought with, sparing not one, nor swerved
 A hand's-breadth, Lord, in the perilous place—

"I pray thee say to this man, O Lord,
Sit thou for him at my feet on a throne.
 I will face thy wrath, though it bite as a sword,
 And my soul shall burn for his soul, and atone.

"For, Lord, thou knowest, O God most wise,
 How gracious on earth were his deeds towards me.
 Shall this be a small thing in thine eyes,
 That is greater in mine than the whole great sea?"

'I have loved this woman my whole life long,
 And even for love's sake when have I said
 "I love you"? when have I done you wrong,
 Living? but now I shall have you dead.

'Yea, now, do I bid you love me, love?
 Love me or loathe, we are one, not twain.

But God be praised in his heaven above
For this my pleasure and that my pain!

‘For never a man, being mean like me,
Shall die like me till the whole world dies.
I shall drown with her, laughing for love; and she
Mix with me, touching me, lips and eyes.

‘Shall she not know me and see me all through,
Me, on whose heart as a worm she trod?
You have given me, God requite it you,
What man yet never was given of God.

‘O sweet one love, O my life’s delight,
Dear, though the days have divided us,
Lost beyond hope, taken far out of sight,
Not twice in the world shall the gods do thus.

‘Had it been so hard for my love? but I,
Though the gods gave all that a god can give,
I had chosen rather the gift to die,
Cease, and be glad above all that live.

‘For the Loire would have driven us down to the sea,
And the sea would have pitched us from shoal to shoal;
And I should have held you, and you held me,
As flesh holds flesh, and the soul the soul.

‘Could I change you, help you to love me, sweet,
Could I give you the love that would sweeten death,
We should yield, go down, locked hands and feet,
Die, drown together, and breath catch breath;

‘But you would have felt my soul in a kiss,
And known that once if I loved you well;
And I would have given my soul for this
To burn for ever in burning hell.’



ANACTORIA

τίνος αὖ τὺ πειθοῖ
 μὰψ σαγηνεύσας φιλότατα;

SAPPHO

MY life is bitter with thy love; thine eyes
 Blind me, thy tresses burn me, thy sharp sighs
 Divide my flesh and spirit with soft sound,
 And my blood strengthens, and my veins abound.
 I pray thee sigh not, speak not, draw not breath;
 Let life burn down, and dream it is not death.
 I would the sea had hidden us, the fire
 (Wilt thou fear that, and fear not my desire?)
 Severed the bones that bleach, the flesh that cleaves,
 And let our sifted ashes drop like leaves.
 I feel thy blood against my blood: my pain
 Pains thee, and lips bruise lips, and vein stings vein.
 Let fruit be crushed on fruit, let flower on flower,
 Breast kindle breast, and either burn one hour.
 Why wilt thou follow lesser loves? are thine
 Too weak to bear these hands and lips of mine?
 I charge thee for my life's sake, O too sweet
 To crush love with thy cruel faultless feet,
 I charge thee keep thy lips from hers or his,
 Sweetest, till theirs be sweeter than my kiss:
 Lest I too lure, a swallow for a dove,
 Erotion or Erinna to my love.
 I would my love could kill thee; I am satiated
 With seeing thee live, and fain would have thee dead.

I would earth had thy body as fruit to eat,
 And no mouth but some serpent's found thee sweet.
 I would find grievous ways to have thee slain,
 Intense device, and superflux of pain;
 Vex thee with amorous agonies, and shake
 Life at thy lips, and leave it there to ache;
 Strain out thy soul with pangs too soft to kill,
 Intolerable interludes, and infinite ill;
 Relapse and reluctance of the breath,
 Dumb tunes and shuddering semitones of death.
 I am weary of all thy words and soft strange ways,
 Of all Love's fiery nights and all his days,
 And all the broken kisses salt as brine
 That shuddering lips make moist with waterish wine,
 And eyes the bluer for all those hidden hours
 That pleasure fills with tears and feeds from flowers,
 Fierce at the heart with fire that half comes through,
 But all the flowerlike white stained round with blue;
 The fervent underlid, and that above
 Lifted with laughter or abashed with love;
 Thine amorous girdle, full of thee and fair,
 And leavings of the lilies in thine hair.
 Yea, all sweet words of thine and all thy ways,
 And all the fruit of nights and flower of days,
 And stinging lips wherein the hot sweet brine
 That Love was born of burns and foams like wine,
 And eyes insatiable of amorous hours,
 Fervent as fire and delicate as flowers,
 Coloured like night at heart, but cloven through
 Like night with flame, dyed round like night with blue,
 Clothed with deep eyelids under and above—
 Yea, all thy beauty sickens me with love;

Thy girdle empty of thee and now not fair,
 And ruinous lilies in thy languid hair.
 Ah, take no thought for Love's sake; shall this be,
 And she who loves thy lover not love thee?
 Sweet soul, sweet mouth of all that laughs and lives,
 Mine is she, very mine; and she forgives.
 For I beheld in sleep the light that is
 In her high place in Paphos, heard the kiss
 Of body and soul that mix with eager tears
 And laughter stinging through the eyes and ears;
 Saw Love, as burning flame from crown to feet,
 Imperishable, upon her storied seat;
 Clear eyelids lifted toward the north and south,
 A mind of many colours, and a mouth
 Of many tunes and kisses; and she bowed,
 With all her subtle face laughing aloud,
 Bowed down upon me, saying, 'Who doth thee wrong,
 Sappho?' but thou—thy body is the song,
 Thy mouth the music; thou art more than I,
 Though my voice die not till the whole world die;
 Though men that hear it madden; though love weep,
 Though nature change, though shame be charmed to sleep.
 Ah, wilt thou slay me lest I kiss thee dead?
 Yet the queen laughed from her sweet heart and said:
 'Even she that flies shall follow for thy sake,
 And she shall give thee gifts that would not take,
 Shall kiss that would not kiss thee' (yea, kiss me)
 'When thou wouldst not'—when I would not kiss thee!
 Ah, more to me than all men as thou art,
 Shall not my songs assuage her at the heart?
 Ah, sweet to me as life seems sweet to death,
 Why should her wrath fill thee with fearful breath?

Nay, sweet, for is she God alone? hath she
 Made earth and all the centuries of the sea,
 Taught the sun ways to travel, woven most fine
 The moonbeams, shed the starbeams forth as wine,
 Bound with her myrtles, beaten with her rods,
 The young men and the maidens and the gods?
 Have we not lips to love with, eyes for tears,
 And summer and flower of women and of years?
 Stars for the foot of morning, and for noon
 Sunlight, and exaltation of the moon;
 Waters that answer waters, fields that wear
 Lilies, and languor of the Lesbian air?
 Beyond those flying feet of fluttered doves,
 Are there not other gods for other loves?
 Yea, though she scourge thee, sweetest, for my sake,
 Blossom not thorns and flowers not blood should break.
 Ah that my lips were tuneless lips, but pressed
 To the bruised blossom of thy scourged white breast!
 Ah that my mouth for Muses' milk were fed
 On the sweet blood thy sweet small wounds had bled!
 That with my tongue I felt them, and could taste
 The faint flakes from thy bosom to the waist!
 That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat
 Thy breasts like honey! that from face to feet
 Thy body were abolished and consumed,
 And in my flesh thy very flesh entombed!
 Ah, ah, thy beauty! like a beast it bites,
 Stings like an adder, like an arrow smites.
 Ah sweet, and sweet again, and seven times sweet,
 The paces and the pauses of thy feet!
 Ah sweeter than all sleep or summer air
 The fallen fillets fragrant from thine hair!

Yea, though their alien kisses do me wrong,
 Sweeter thy lips than mine with all their song;
 Thy shoulders whiter than a fleece of white,
 And flower-sweet fingers, good to bruise or bite
 As honeycomb of the inmost honey-cells,
 With almond-shaped and roseleaf-coloured shells
 And blood like purple blossom at the tips
 Quivering; and pain made perfect in thy lips
 For my sake when I hurt thee; O that I
 Durst crush thee out of life with love, and die,
 Die of thy pain and my delight, and be
 Mixed with thy blood and molten into thee!
 Would I not plague thee dying overmuch?
 Would I not hurt thee perfectly? not touch
 Thy pores of sense with torture, and make bright
 Thine eyes with bloodlike tears and grievous light?
 Strike pang from pang as note is struck from note,
 Catch the sob's middle music in thy throat,
 Take thy limbs living, and new-mould with these
 A lyre of many faultless agonies?
 Feed thee with fever and famine and fine drouth,
 With perfect pangs convulse thy perfect mouth,
 Make thy life shudder in thee and burn afresh,
 And wring thy very spirit through the flesh?
 Cruel? but Love makes all that love him well
 As wise as heaven and crueller than hell.
 Me hath love made more bitter toward thee
 Than death toward man; but were I made as he
 Who hath made all things to break them one by one,
 If my feet trod upon the stars and sun
 And souls of men as his have alway trod,
 God knows I might be crueller than God.

For who shall change with prayers or thanksgivings
 The mystery of the cruelty of things?
 Or say what God above all gods and years
 With offering and blood-sacrifice of tears,
 With lamentation from strange lands, from graves
 Where the snake pastures, from scarred mouths of slaves,
 From prison, and from plunging prows of ships
 Through flamelike foam of the sea's closing lips—
 With thwartings of strange signs, and wind-blown hair
 Of comets, desolating the dim air,
 When darkness is made fast with seals and bars,
 And fierce reluctance of disastrous stars,
 Eclipse, and sound of shaken hills, and wings
 Darkening, and blind inexpiable things—
 With sorrow of labouring moons, and altering light
 And travail of the planets of the night,
 And weeping of the weary Pleiads seven,
 Feeds the mute melancholy lust of heaven?
 Is not his incense bitterness, his meat
 Murder? his hidden face and iron feet
 Hath not man known, and felt them on their way
 Threaten and trample all things and every day?
 Hath he not sent us hunger? who hath cursed
 Spirit and flesh with longing? filled with thirst
 Their lips who cried unto him? who bade exceed
 The fervid will, fall short the feeble deed,
 Bade sink the spirit and the flesh aspire,
 Pain animate the dust of dead desire,
 And life yield up her flower to violent fate?
 Him would I reach, him smite, him desecrate,
 Pierce the cold lips of God with human breath,
 And mix his immortality with death.

Why hath he made us? what had all we done
 That we should live and loathe the sterile sun,
 And with the moon wax paler as she wanes,
 And pulse by pulse feel time grow through our veins?
 Thee too the years shall cover; thou shalt be
 As the rose born of one same blood with thee,
 As a song sung, as a word said, and fall
 Flower-wise, and be not any more at all,
 Nor any memory of thee anywhere;
 For never Muse has bound above thine hair
 The high Pierian flower whose graft outgrows
 All summer kinship of the mortal rose
 And colour of deciduous days, nor shed
 Reflex and flush of heaven about thine head,
 Nor reddened brows made pale by floral grief
 With splendid shadow from that lordlier leaf.
 Yea, thou shalt be forgotten like spilt wine,
 Except these kisses of my lips on thine
 Brand them with immortality; but me—
 Men shall not see bright fire nor hear the sea,
 Nor mix their hearts with music, nor behold
 Cast forth of heaven, with feet of awful gold
 And plumeless wings that make the bright air blind,
 Lightning, with thunder for a hound behind
 Hunting through fields unfurrowed and unsown,
 But in the light and laughter, in the moan
 And music, and in grasp of lip and hand
 And shudder of water that makes felt on land
 The immeasurable tremor of all the sea,
 Memories shall mix and metaphors of me.
 Like me shall be the shuddering calm of night,
 When all the winds of the world for pure delight

Close lips that quiver and fold up wings that ache;
 When nightingales are louder for love's sake,
 And leaves tremble like lute-strings or like fire;
 Like me the one star swooning with desire
 Even at the cold lips of the sleepless moon,
 As I at thine; like me the waste white noon,
 Burnt through with barren sunlight; and like me
 The land-stream and the tide-stream in the sea.
 I am sick with time as these with ebb and flow,
 And by the yearning in my veins I know
 The yearning sound of waters; and mine eyes
 Burn as that beamless fire which fills the skies
 With troubled stars and travailing things of flame;
 And in my heart the grief consuming them
 Labours, and in my veins the thirst of these,
 And all the summer travail of the trees
 And all the winter sickness; and the Earth,
 Filled full with deadly works of death and birth,
 Sore spent with hungry lusts of birth and death,
 Has pain like mine in her divided breath;
 Her spring of leaves is barren, and her fruit
 Ashes; her boughs are burdened, and her root
 Fibrous and gnarled with poison; underneath
 Serpents have gnawn it through with tortuous teeth
 Made sharp upon the bones of all the dead,
 And wild birds rend her branches overhead.
 These, woven as raiment for his word and thought,
 These hath God made, and me as these, and wrought
 Song, and hath lit it at my lips; and me
 Earth shall not gather though she feed on thee.
 As a shed tear shalt thou be shed; but I—
 Lo, Earth may labour, men live long and die,

Years change and stars, and the high God devise
 New things, and old things wane before his eyes
 Who wields and wrecks them, being more strong than they—
 But, having made me, me he shall not slay.
 Nor slay nor satiate, like those herds of his
 Who laugh and live a little, and their kiss
 Contents them, and their loves are swift and sweet,
 And sure Death grasps and gains them with slow feet,
 Love they or hate they, strive or bow their knees—
 And all these end; he hath his will of these.
 Yea, but albeit he slay me, hating me—
 Albeit he hide me in the deep dear sea
 And cover me with cool wan foam, and ease
 This soul of mine as any soul of these,
 And give me water and great sweet waves, and make
 The very sea's name lordlier for my sake,
 The whole sea sweeter—albeit I die indeed
 And hide myself and sleep and no man heed,
 Of me the high God hath not all his will.
 Blossom of branches, and on each high hill
 Clear air and wind, and under in clamorous vales
 Fierce noises of the fiery nightingales,
 Buds burning in the sudden spring like fire,
 The wan washed sand and the waves' vain desire,
 Sails seen like blown white flowers at sea, and words
 That bring tears swiftest, and long notes of birds
 Violently singing till the whole world sings—
 I Sappho shall be one with all these things,
 With all high things for ever; and my face
 Seen once, my songs once heard in a strange place,
 Cleave to men's lives, and waste the days thereof
 With gladness and much sadness and long love.

Yea, they shall say, Earth's womb has borne in vain
 New things, and never this best thing again;
 Borne days and men, borne fruits and wars and wine,
 Seasons and songs, but no song more like mine.
 And they shall know me as ye who have known me here,
 Last year when I loved Atthis, and this year
 When I love thee; and they shall praise me, and say
 'She hath all time as all we have our day,
 Shall she not live and have her will'—even I?
 Yea, though thou diest, I say I shall not die.
 For these shall give me of their souls, shall give
 Life, and the days and loves wherewith I live,
 Shall quicken me with loving, fill with breath,
 Save me and serve me, strive for me with death.
 Alas, that neither moon nor snow nor dew
 Nor all cold things can purge me wholly through,
 Assuage me nor allay me nor appease,
 Till supreme sleep shall bring me bloodless ease;
 Till Time wax faint in all his periods;
 Till Fate undo the bondage of the gods,
 And lay, to slake and satiate me all through,
 Lotus and Lethe on my lips like dew,
 And shed around and over and under me
 Thick darkness and the insuperable sea.



FRAGOLETTA

O LOVE! what shall be said of thee?
 The son of grief begot by joy?
 Being sightless, wilt thou see?
 Being sexless, wilt thou be
 Maiden or boy?

I dreamed of strange lips yesterday
 And cheeks wherein the ambiguous blood
 Was like a rose's—yea,
 A rose's when it lay
 Within the bud.

What fields have bred thee, or what groves
 Concealed thee, O mysterious flower,
 O double rose of Love's,
 With leaves that lure the doves
 From bud to bower?

I dare not kiss it, lest my lip
 Press harder than an indrawn breath,
 And all the sweet life slip
 Forth, and the sweet leaves drip,
 Bloodlike, in death.

O sole desire of my delight!
 O sole delight of my desire!
 Mine eyelids and eyesight
 Feed on thee day and night
 Like lips of fire.

Lean back thy throat of carven pearl,
 Let thy mouth murmur like the dove's;
 Say, Venus hath no girl,
 No front of female curl,
 Among her Loves.

Thy sweet low bosom, thy close hair,
 Thy strait soft flanks and slenderer feet,
 Thy virginal strange air,
 Are these not over fair
 For Love to greet?

How should he greet thee? what new name,
 Fit to move all men's hearts, could move
 Thee, deaf to love or shame,
 Love's sister, by the same
 Mother as Love?

Ah sweet, the maiden's mouth is cold,
 Her breast-blossoms are simply red,
 Her hair mere brown or gold,
 Fold over simple fold
 Binding her head.

Thy mouth is made of fire and wine,
 Thy barren bosom takes my kiss
 And turns my soul to thine
 And turns thy lip to mine,
 And mine it is.

Thou hast a serpent in thine hair,
 In all the curls that close and cling;

And ah, thy breast-flower!
Ah love, thy mouth too fair
To kiss and sting!

Cleave to me, love me, kiss mine eyes,
Sate thy lips with loving me;
Nay, for thou shalt not rise;
Lie still as Love that dies
For love of thee.

Mine arms are close about thine head,
My lips are fervent on thy face,
And where my kiss hath fed
Thy flower-like blood leaps red
To the kissed place.

O bitterness of things too sweet!
O broken singing of the dove!
Love's wings are over fleet,
And like the panther's feet
The feet of Love.



ST. DOROTHY

It hath been seen and yet it shall be seen
 That out of tender mouths God's praise hath been
 Made perfect, and with wood and simple string
 He hath played music sweet as shawm-playing
 To please himself with softness of all sound;
 And no small thing but hath been sometime found
 Full sweet of use, and no such humbleness
 But God hath bruised withal the sentences
 And evidence of wise men witnessing;
 No leaf that is so soft a hidden thing
 It never shall get sight of the great sun;
 The strength of ten has been the strength of one,
 And lowliness has waxed imperious.

There was in Rome a man Theophilus
 Of right great blood and gracious ways, that had
 All noble fashions to make people glad
 And a soft life of pleasurable days;
 He was a goodly man for one to praise,
 Flawless and whole upward from foot to head;
 His arms were a red hawk that alway fed
 On a small bird with feathers gnawed upon,
 Beaten and plucked about the bosom-bone
 Whereby a small round fleck like fire there was:
 They called it in their tongue lampdias;
 This was the banner of the lordly man.
 In many straits of sea and reaches wan
 Full of quick wind, and many a shaken firth,
 It had seen fighting days of either earth,

Westward or east of waters Gaditane
 (This was the place of sea-rocks under Spain
 Called after the great praise of Hercules)
 And north beyond the washing Pontic seas,
 Far windy Russian places fabulous,
 And salt fierce tides of storm-swoln Bosphorus.

Now as this lord came straying in Rome town
 He saw a little lattice open down
 And after it a press of maidens' heads
 That sat upon their cold small quiet beds
 Talking, and played upon short-stringèd lutes;
 And other some ground perfume out of roots
 Gathered by marvellous moons in Asia;
 Saffron and aloes and wild cassia,
 Coloured all through and smelling of the sun;
 And over all these was a certain one
 Clothed softly, with sweet herbs about her hair
 And bosom flowerful; her face more fair
 Than sudden-singing April in soft lands:
 Eyed like a gracious bird, and in both hands
 She held a psalter painted green and red.

This Theophile laughed at the heart, and said,
 Now God so help me hither and St. Paul,
 As by the new time of their festival
 I have good will to take this maid to wife.
 And herewith fell to fancies of her life
 And soft half-thoughts that ended suddenly.
 This is man's guise to please himself, when he
 Shall not see one thing of his pleasant things,
 Nor with outwatch of many travailings
 Come to be eased of the least pain he hath
 For all his love and all his foolish wrath

And all the heavy manner of his mind.
 Thus is he like a fisher fallen blind
 That casts his nets across the boat awry
 To strike the sea, but lo, he striketh dry
 And plucks them back all broken for his pain
 And bites his beard and casts across again
 And reaching wrong slips over in the sea.
 So hath this man a strangled neck for fee,
 For all his cost he chuckles in his throat.

This Theophile that little hereof wote
 Laid wait to hear of her what she might be:
 Men told him she had name of Dorothy,
 And was a lady of a worthy house.
 Thereat this knight grew inly glorious
 That he should have a love so fair of place.
 She was a maiden of most quiet face,
 Tender of speech, and had no hardihood,
 But was nigh feeble of her fearful blood;
 Her mercy in her was so marvellous
 From her least years, that seeing her school-fellows
 That read beside her stricken with a rod,
 She would cry sore and say some word to God
 That he would ease her fellow of his pain.
 There is no touch of sun or fallen rain
 That ever fell on a more gracious thing.

In middle Rome there was in stone-working
 The church of Venus painted royally.
 The chapels of it were some two or three,
 In each of them her tabernacle was
 And a wide window of six feet in glass
 Coloured with all her works in red and gold.
 The altars had bright cloths and cups to hold

The wine of Venus for the services,
 Made out of honey and crushed wood-berries
 That shed sweet yellow through the thick wet red.
 That on high days was borne upon the head
 Of Venus' priest for any man to drink;
 So that in drinking he should fall to think
 On some fair face, and in the thought thereof
 Worship, and such should triumph in his love.
 For this soft wine that did such grace and good
 Was new trans-shaped and mixed with Love's own blood,
 That in the fighting Trojan time was bled;
 For which came such a woe to Diomed
 That he was stifled after in hard sea.
 And some said that this wine-shedding should be
 Made of the falling of Adonis' blood,
 That curled upon the thorns and broken wood
 And round the gold silk shoes on Venus' feet;
 The taste thereof was as hot honey sweet
 And in the mouth ran soft and riotous.
 This was the holiness of Venus' house.

It was their worship, that in August days
 Twelve maidens should go through those Roman ways
 Naked, and having gold across their brows
 And their hair twisted in short golden rows,
 To minister to Venus in this wise:
 And twelve men chosen in their companies
 To match these maidens by the altar-stair,
 All in one habit, crowned upon the hair.
 Among these men was chosen Theophile.

This knight went out and prayed a little while,
 Holding queen Venus by her hands and knees:
 I will give thee twelve royal images

Cut in glad gold, with marvels of wrought stone
 For thy sweet priests to lean and pray upon,
 Jasper and hyacinth and chrysopras,
 And the strange Asian thalamite that was
 Hidden twelve ages under heavy sea
 Among the little sleepy pearls, to be
 A shrine lit over with soft candle-flame
 Burning all night red as hot brows of shame,
 So thou wilt be my lady without sin.
 Goddess that art all gold outside and in,
 Help me to serve thee in thy holy way.
 Thou knowest, Love, that in my bearing day
 There shone a laughter in the singing stars
 Round the gold-ceilèd bride-bed wherein Mars
 Touched thee and had thee in your kissing wise.
 Now therefore, sweet, kiss thou my maiden's eyes
 That they may open graciously towards me;
 And this new fashion of thy shrine shall be
 As soft with gold as thine own happy head.

The goddess, that was painted with face red
 Between two long green tumbled sides of sea,
 Stooped her neck sideways, and spake pleasantly:
 Thou shalt have grace as thou art thrall of mine.
 And with this came a savour of shed wine
 And plucked-out petals from a rose's head:
 And softly with slow laughs of lip she said,
 Thou shalt have favour all thy days of me.

Then came Theophilus to Dorothy,
 Saying: O sweet, if one should strive or speak
 Against God's ways, he gets a beaten cheek
 For all his wage and shame above all men.
 Therefore I have no will to turn again

When God saith 'go', lest a worse thing fall out.
 Then she, misdoubting lest he went about
 To catch her wits, made answer somewhat thus:
 I have no will, my lord Theophilus,
 To speak against this worthy word of yours;
 Knowing how God's will in all speech endures,
 That save by grace there may no thing be said.
 Then Theophile waxed light from foot to head,
 And softly fell upon this answering.
 It is well seen you are a chosen thing
 To do God service in his gracious way.
 I will that you make haste and holiday
 To go next year upon the Venus stair,
 Covered none else, but crowned upon your hair,
 And do the service that a maiden doth.
 She said: but I that am Christ's maid were loth
 To do this thing that hath such bitter name.
 Thereat his brows were beaten with sore shame
 And he came off and said no other word.
 Then his eyes chanced upon his banner-bird,
 And he fell fingering at the staff of it
 And laughed for wrath and stared between his feet,
 And out of a chafed heart he spake as thus:
 Lo how she japes at me, Theophilus,
 Feigning herself a fool and hard to love;
 Yet in good time for all she boasteth of
 She shall be like a little beaten bird.
 And while his mouth was open in that word
 He came upon the house Janiculum,
 Where some went busily, and other some
 Talked in the gate called the Gate Glorious.
 The emperor, which was one Gabalus,



Sat over all and drank chill wine alone.
 To whom is come Theophilus anon,
 And said as thus: *Beau sire, Dieu vous aide.*
 And afterward sat under him, and said
 All this thing through as ye have wholly heard.

This Gabalus laughed thickly in his beard.
 Yea, this is righteousness and maiden rule.
 Truly, he said, a maid is but a fool.
 And japed at them as one full villainous,
 In a lewd wise, this heathen Gabalus,
 And sent his men to bind her as he bade.
 Thus have they taken Dorothy the maid,
 And haled her forth as men hale pick-purses:
 A little need God knows they had of this,
 To hale her by her maiden gentle hair.
 Thus went she lowly, making a soft prayer,
 As one who stays the sweet wine in his mouth,
 Murmuring with eased lips, and is most loth
 To have done wholly with the sweet of it.

Christ king, fair Christ, that knowest all men's wit
 And all the feeble fashion of my ways,
 O perfect God, that from all yesterdays
 Abidest whole with morrows perfected,
 I pray thee by thy mother's holy head
 Thou help me to do right, that I not slip:
 I have no speech nor strength upon my lip,
 Except thou help me who art wise and sweet.
 Do this too for those nails that clove thy feet,
 Let me die maiden after many pains.
 Though I be least among thy handmaidens,
 Doubtless I shall take death more sweetly thus.

Now have they brought her to King Gabalus,

Who laughed in all his throat some breathing-whiles:
 By God, he said, if one should leap two miles,
 He were not pained about the sides so much.
 This were a soft thing for a man to touch.
 Shall one so chafe that hath such little bones?
 And shook his throat with thick and chuckled moans
 For laughter that she had such holiness.
 What aileth thee, wilt thou do services?
 It were good fare to fare as Venus doth.

Then said this lady with her maiden mouth
 Shamefaced, and something paler in the cheek:
 Now, sir, albeit my wit and will to speak
 Give me no grace in sight of worthy men,
 For all my shame yet know I this again,
 I may not speak, nor after downlying
 Rise up to take delight in lute-playing,
 Nor sing nor sleep, nor sit and fold my hands.
 But my soul in some measure understands
 God's grace laid like a garment over me.
 For this fair God that out of strong sharp sea
 Lifted the shapely and green-coloured land,
 And hath the weight of heaven in his hand
 As one might hold a bird, and under him
 The heavy golden planets beam by beam
 Building the feasting-chambers of his house,
 And the large world he holdeth with his brows,
 And with the light of them astonisheth
 All place and time and face of life and death
 And motion of the north wind and the south,
 And is the sound within his angel's mouth
 Of singing words and words of thanksgiving,
 And is the colour of the latter spring

And heat upon the summer and the sun,
 And is beginning of all things begun
 And gathers in him all things to their end,
 And with the fingers of his hand doth bend
 The stretched-out sides of heaven like a sail,
 And with his breath he maketh the red pale
 And fills with blood faint faces of men dead,
 And with the sound between his lips are fed
 Iron and fire and the white body of snow,
 And blossom of all trees in places low,
 And small bright herbs about the little hills,
 And fruit pricked softly with birds' tender bills,
 And flight of foam about green fields of sea,
 And fourfold strength of the great winds that be
 Moved always outward from beneath his feet,
 And growth of grass and growth of sheavèd wheat
 And all green flower of goodly-growing lands;
 And all these things he gathers with his hands
 And covers all their beauty with his wings;
 The same, even God that governs all these things,
 Hath set my feet to be upon his ways.
 Now therefore for no painfulness of days
 I shall put off this service bound on me.
 Also, fair sir, ye know this certainly,
 How God was in his flesh full chaste and meek
 And gave his face to shame, and either cheek
 Gave up to smiting of men tyrannous.

And here with a great voice this Gabalus
 Cried out and said: By God's blood and his bones,
 This were good game betwixen night and nones
 For one to sit and hearken to such saws:
 I were as lief fall in some big beast's jaws

As hear these women's jaw-teeth clattering;
 By God, a woman is the harder thing,
 One may not put a hook into her mouth.
 Now by St. Luke I am so sore adrouth
 For all these saws I must needs drink again.
 But I pray God deliver all us men
 From all such noise of women and their heat.
 That is a noble scripture, well I weet,
 That likens women to an empty can;
 When God said that he was a full wise man.
 I trow no man may blame him as for that.

And herewithal he drank a draught, and spat,
 And said: Now shall I make an end hereof.
 Come near all men and hearken for God's love,
 And ye shall hear a jest or twain, God wot.
 And spake as thus with mouth full thick and hot;
 But thou do this thou shalt be shortly slain.
 Lo, sir, she said, this death and all his pain
 I take in penance of my bitter sins.
 Yea now, quoth Gabalus, this game begins.
 Lo, without sin one shall not live a span.
 Lo, this is she that would not look on man
 Between her fingers folded in thwart wise.
 See how her shame hath smitten in her eyes
 That was so clean she had not heard of shame.
 Certes, he said, by Gabalus my name,
 This two years back I was not so well pleased.
 This were good mirth for sick men to be eased
 And rise up whole and laugh at hearing of.
 I pray thee show us something of thy love,
 Since thou wast maid thy gown is waxen wide.
 Yea, maid I am, she said, and somewhat sighed,

As one who thought upon the low fair house
 Where she sat working, with soft bended brows
 Watching her threads, among the school-maidens.
 And she thought well now God had brought her thence
 She should not come to sew her gold again.

Then cried King Gabalus upon his men
 To have her forth and draw her with steel gins.
 And as a man hag-ridden beats and grins
 And bends his body sidelong in his bed,
 So wagged he with his body and knave's head,
 Gaping at her, and blowing with his breath.
 And in good time he gat an evil death
 Out of his lewdness with his cursèd wives:
 His bones were hewn asunder as with knives
 For his misliving, certes it is said.
 But all the evil wrought upon this maid,
 It were full hard for one to handle it.
 For her soft blood was shed upon her feet,
 And all her body's colour bruised and faint.
 But she, as one abiding God's great saint,
 Spake not nor wept for all this travail hard.
 Wherefore the king commanded afterward
 To slay her presently in all men's sight.
 And it was now an hour upon the night
 And winter-time, and a few stars began.
 The weather was yet feeble and all wan
 For beating of a weighty wind and snow.
 And she came walking in soft wise and slow,
 And many men with faces piteous.
 Then came this heavy cursing Gabalus,
 That swore full hard into his drunken beard;
 And faintly after without any word

Came Theophile some paces off the king.
 And in the middle of this wayfaring,
 Full tenderly beholding her he said:

There is no word of comfort with men dead,
 Nor any face and colour of things sweet;
 But always with lean cheeks and lifted feet
 These dead men lie all aching to the blood
 With bitter cold, their brows withouten hood
 Beating for chill, their bodies swathed full thin:
 Alas, what hire shall any have herein
 To give his life and get such bitterness?
 Also the soul going forth bodiless
 Is hurt with naked cold, and no man saith
 If there be house or covering for death
 To hide the soul that is discomforted.

Then she beholding him a little said:
 Alas, fair lord, ye have no wit of this;
 For on one side Death is full poor of bliss
 And as ye say full sharp of bone and lean:
 But on the other side is good and green
 And hath soft flower of tender-coloured hair
 Grown on his head, and a red mouth as fair
 As may be kissed with lips; thereto his face
 Is as God's face, and in a perfect place
 Full of all sun and colour of straight boughs
 And waterheads about a painted house
 That hath a mile of flowers either way
 Outward from it, and blossom-grass of May
 Thickening on many a side for length of heat,
 Hath God set Death upon a noble seat
 Covered with green and flowered in the fold,
 In likeness of a great king grown full old

And gentle with new temperance of blood;
 And on his brows a purpled purple hood,
 They may not carry any golden thing;
 And plays some tune with subtle fingering
 On a small cithern, full of tears and sleep
 And heavy pleasure that is quick to weep,
 And Sorrow with the honey in her mouth;
 And for this might of music that he doth
 Are all souls drawn toward him with great love
 And weep for sweetness of the noise thereof
 And bow to him with worship of their knees;
 And all the field is thick with companies
 Of fair-clothed men that play on shawms and lutes
 And gather honey of the yellow fruits
 Between the branches waxen soft and wide:
 And all this peace endures in either side
 Of the green land, and God beholdeth all.
 And this is girdled with a round fair wall
 Made of red stone and cool with heavy leaves
 Grown out against it, and green blossom cleaves
 To the green chinks, and lesser wall-weed sweet,
 Kissing the crannies that are split with heat,
 And branches where the summer draws to head.

And Theophile burnt in the cheek, and said:
 Yea, could one see it, this were marvellous.
 I pray you, at your coming to this house,
 Give me some leaf of all those tree-branches;
 Seeing how so sharp and white our weather is,
 There is no green nor gracious red to see.

Yea, sir, she said, that shall I certainly.
 And from her long sweet throat without a fleck
 Undid the gold, and through her stretched-out neck

The cold axe clove, and smote away her head:
 Out of her throat the tender blood full red
 Fell suddenly through all her long soft hair.
 And with good speed for hardness of the air
 Each man departed to his house again.

Lo, as fair colour in the face of men
 At seed-time of their blood, or in such wise
 As a thing seen increaseth in men's eyes,
 Caught first far off by sickly fits of sight,
 So a word said, if one shall hear aright,
 Abides against the season of its growth.
 This Theophile went slowly, as one doth
 That is not sure for sickness of his feet;
 And counting the white stonework of the street,
 Tears fell out of his eyes for wrath and love,
 Making him weep more for the shame thereof
 Than for true pain: so went he half a mile.
 And women mocked him, saying: Theophile,
 Lo, she is dead; what shall a woman have
 That loveth such an one? so Christ me save,
 I were as lief to love a man new-hung.
 Surely this man has bitten on his tongue,
 This makes him sad and writhled in his face.

And when they came upon the paven place
 That was called sometime the Place Amorous,
 There came a child before Theophilus
 Bearing a basket, and said suddenly:
 Fair sir, this is my mistress Dorothy
 That sends you gifts; and with this he was gone.
 In all this earth there is not such an one
 For colour and straight stature made so fair.
 The tender growing gold of his pure hair

Was as wheat growing, and his mouth as flame.
 God called him Holy after his own name;
 With gold cloth like fire burning he was clad.
 But for the fair green basket that he had,
 It was filled up with heavy white and red;
 Great roses stained still where the first rose bled,
 Burning at heart for shame their heart withholds:
 And the sad colour of strong marigolds
 That have the sun to kiss their lips for love;
 The flower that Venus' hair is woven of,
 The colour of fair apples in the sun,
 Late peaches gathered when the heat was done
 And the slain air got breath; and after these
 The fair faint-headed poppies drunk with ease,
 And heaviness of hollow lilies red.

Then cried they all that saw these things, and said
 It was God's doing, and was marvellous.
 And in brief while this knight Theophilus
 Is waxen full of faith, and witnesseth
 Before the king of God and love and death,
 For which the king bade hang him presently.
 A gallows of a goodly piece of tree
 This Gabalus hath made to hang him on.
 Forth of this world lo Theophile is gone
 With a wried neck, God give us better fare
 Than his that hath a twisted throat to wear;
 But truly for his love God hath him brought
 There where his heavy body grieves him nought
 Nor all the people plucking at his feet;
 But in his face his lady's face is sweet,
 And through his lips her kissing lips are gone:
 God send him peace, and joy of such an one.

This is the story of St. Dorothy.
I will you of your mercy pray for me
Because I wrote these sayings for your grace,
That I may one day see her in the face.



SATIA TE SANGUINE

If you loved me ever so little,
 I could bear the bonds that gall,
 I could dream the bonds were brittle;
 You do not love me at all.

O beautiful lips, O bosom
 More white than the moon's and warm,
 A sterile, a ruinous blossom
 Is blown your way in a storm.

As the lost white feverish limbs
 Of the Lesbian Sappho, adrift
 In foam where the sea-weed swims,
 Swam loose for the streams to lift,

My heart swims blind in a sea
 That stuns me; swims to and fro,
 And gathers to windward and lee
 Lamentation, and mourning, and woe.

A broken, an emptied boat,
 Sea saps it, winds blow apart,
 Sick and adrift and afloat,
 The barren waif of a heart.

Where, when the gods would be cruel,
 Do they go for a torture? where
 Plant thorns, set pain like a jewel?
 Ah, not in the flesh, not there!

The racks of earth and the rods
 Are weak as foam on the sands;
 In the heart is the prey for gods,
 Who crucify hearts, not hands.

Mere pangs corrode and consume,
 Dead when life dies in the brain;
 In the infinite spirit is room
 For the pulse of an infinite pain.

I wish you were dead, my dear;
 I would give you, had I to give,
 Some death too bitter to fear;
 It is better to die than live.

I wish you were stricken of thunder
 And burnt with a bright flame through.
 Consumed and cloven in sunder,
 I dead at your feet like you.

If I could but know after all,
 I might cease to hunger and ache,
 Though your heart were ever so small,
 If it were not a stone or a snake.

You are crueller, you that we love,
 Than hatred, hunger, or death;
 You have eyes and breasts like a dove,
 And you kill men's hearts with a breath.

As plague in a poisonous city
 Insults and exults on her dead,



So you, when pallid for pity
Comes Love, and fawns to be fed.

As a tame beast writhes and wheedles,
He fawns to be fed with wiles;
You carve him a cross of needles,
And whet them sharp as your smiles.

He is patient of thorn and whip,
He is dumb under axe or dart;
You suck with a sleepy red lip
The wet red wounds in his heart.

You thrill as his pulses dwindle,
You brighten and warm as he bleeds,
With insatiable eyes that kindle
And insatiable mouth that feeds.

Your hands nailed Love to the tree,
You stript him, scourged him with rods,
And drowned him deep in the sea
That hides the dead and their gods.

And for all this, die will he not;
There is no man sees him but I;
You came and went and forgot;
I hope he will some day die.



THE GARDEN OF PROSERPINE

HERE, where the world is quiet;
 Here, where all trouble seems
 Dead winds' and spent waves' riot
 In doubtful dreams of dreams;
 I watch the green field growing
 For reaping folk and sowing,
 For harvest-time and mowing,
 A sleepy world of streams.

I am tired of tears and laughter,
 And men that laugh and weep;
 Of what may come hereafter
 For men that sow to reap:
 I am weary of days and hours,
 Blown buds of barren flowers,
 Desires and dreams and powers
 And everything but sleep.

Here life has death for neighbour,
 And far from eye or ear
 Wan waves and wet winds labour,
 Weak ships and spirits steer;
 They drive adrift, and whither
 They wot not who make thither;
 But no such winds blow hither,
 And no such things grow here.

No growth of moor or coppice,
 No heather-flower or vine,
 But bloomless buds of poppies,
 Green grapes of Proserpine,
 Pale beds of blowing rushes
 Where no leaf blooms or blushes
 Save this whereout she crushes
 For dead men deadly wine.

Pale, without name or number,
 In fruitless fields of corn,
 They bow themselves and slumber
 All night till light is born;
 And like a soul belated,
 In hell and heaven unmated,
 By cloud and mist abated
 Comes out of darkness morn.

Though one were strong as seven,
 He too with death shall dwell,
 Nor wake with wings in heaven,
 Nor weep for pains in hell;
 Though one were fair as roses,
 His beauty clouds and closes;
 And well though love reposes,
 In the end it is not well.

Pale, beyond porch and portal,
 Crowned with calm leaves, she stands
 Who gathers all things mortal
 With cold immortal hands;

Her languid lips are sweeter
 Than Love's who fears to greet her
 To men that mix and meet her
 From many times and lands.

She waits for each and other,
 She waits for all men born;
 Forgets the Earth her mother,
 The life of fruits and corn;
 And spring and seed and swallow
 Take wing for her and follow
 Where summer song rings hollow
 And flowers are put to scorn.

There go the loves that wither,
 The old loves with wearier wings;
 And all dead years draw thither,
 And all disastrous things;
 Dead dreams of days forsaken,
 Blind buds that snows have shaken,
 Wild leaves that winds have taken,
 Red strays of ruined springs.

We are not sure of sorrow,
 And joy was never sure;
 To-day will die to-morrow;
 Time stoops to no man's lure;
 And Love, grown faint and fretful,
 With lips but half regretful
 Sighs, and with eyes forgetful
 Weeps that no loves endure.

✓ From too much love of living,
 From hope and fear set free,
 We thank with brief thanksgiving
 Whatever gods may be
 That no life lives for ever;
 That dead men rise up never;
 That even the weariest river
 Winds somewhere safe to sea.

Then star nor sun shall waken,
 Nor any change of light:
 Nor sound of waters shaken,
 Nor any sound or sight:
 Nor wintry leaves nor vernal,
 Nor days nor things diurnal;
 Only the sleep eternal
 In an eternal night.



LOVE AT SEA

WE are in Love's land to-day;
 Where shall we go?
 Love, shall we start or stay,
 Or sail or row?
 There 's many a wind and way,
 And never a May but May;
 We are in Love's hand to-day;
 Where shall we go?

Our landwind is the breath
 Of sorrows kissed to death
 And joys that were;
 Our ballast is a rose;
 Our way lies where God knows
 And Love knows where.
 We are in Love's hand to-day—

Our seamen are fledged Loves,
 Our masts are bills of doves,
 Our decks fine gold;
 Our ropes are dead maids' hair,
 Our stores are love-shafts fair
 And manifold.
 We are in Love's land to-day—

Where shall we land you, sweet?
 On fields of strange men's feet,
 Or fields near home?

Or where the fire-flowers blow,
 Or where the flowers of snow
 Or flowers of foam?
 We are in Love's hand to-day—

Land me, she says, where Love
 Shows but one shaft, one dove,
 One heart, one hand.
 —A shore like that, my dear,
 Lies where no man will steer,
 No maiden land.

Imitated from Théophile Gautier



FÉLISE

Mais où sont les neiges d'antan?

WHAT shall be said between us here
 Among the downs, between the trees,
 In fields that knew our feet last year,
 In sight of quiet sands and seas,
 This year, Félice?

Who knows what word were best to say?
 For last year's leaves lie dead and red
 On this sweet day, in this green May,
 And barren corn makes bitter bread.
 What shall be said?

Here as last year the fields begin,
 A fire of flowers and glowing grass;
 The old fields we laughed and lingered in,
 Seeing each our souls in last year's glass,
 Félice, alas!

Shall we not laugh, shall we not weep,
 Not we, though this be as it is?
 For love awake or love asleep
 Ends in a laugh, a dream, a kiss,
 A song like this.

I that have slept awake, and you
 Sleep, who last year were well awake.
 Though love do all that love can do,

My heart will never ache or break
For your heart's sake.

The great sea, faultless as a flower,
Throbs, trembling under beam and breeze,
And laughs with love of the amorous hour.
I found you fairer once, Félise,
Than flowers or seas.

We played at bondsman and at queen;
But as the days change men change too;
I find the grey sea's notes of green,
The green sea's fervent flakes of blue,
More fair than you.

Your beauty is not over fair
Now in mine eyes, who am grown up wise.
The smell of flowers in all your hair
Allures not now; no sigh replies
If your heart sighs.

But you sigh seldom, you sleep sound,
You find love's new name good enough.
Less sweet I find it than I found
The sweetest name that ever love
Grew weary of.

My snake with bright bland eyes, my snake
Grown tame and glad to be caressed,
With lips athirst for mine to slake
Their tender fever! who had guessed
You loved me best?

I had died for this last year, to know
 You loved me. Who shall turn on fate?
 I care not if love come or go
 Now, though your love seek mine for mate.
 It is too late.

The dust of many strange desires
 Lies deep between us; in our eyes
 Dead smoke of perishable fires
 Flickers, a fume in air and skies,
 A steam of sighs.

You loved me and you loved me not;
 A little, much, and overmuch.
 Will you forget as I forgot?
 Let all dead things lie dead; none such
 Are soft to touch.

I love you and I do not love,
 Too much, a little, not at all;
 Too much, and never yet enough.
 Birds quick to fledge and fly at call
 Are quick to fall.

And these love longer now than men,
 And larger loves than ours are these.
 No diver brings up love again
 Dropped once, my beautiful Félise,
 In such cold seas.

Gone deeper than all plummets sound,
 Where in the dim green dayless day
 The life of such dead things lies bound

As the sea feeds on, wreck and stray
And castaway.

Can I forget? yea, that can I,
And that can all men; so will you,
Alive, or later, when you die.
Ah, but the love you plead was true?
Was mine not too?

I loved you for that name of yours
Long ere we met, and long enough.
Now that one thing of all endures—
The sweetest name that ever love
Waxed weary of.

Like colours in the sea, like flowers,
Like a cat's splendid circled eyes
That wax and wane with love for hours,
Green as green flame, blue-grey like skies,
And soft like sighs—

And all these only like your name,
And your name full of all of these.
I say it, and it sounds the same—
Save that I say it now at ease,
Your name, Félice.

I said 'she must be swift and white,
And subtly warm, and half perverse,
And sweet like sharp soft fruit to bite,
And like a snake's love lithe and fierce.'
Men have guessed worse.

What was the song I made of you
 Here where the grass forgets our feet
 As afternoon forgets the dew?
 Ah that such sweet things should be fleet,
 Such fleet things sweet!

As afternoon forgets the dew,
 As time in time forgets all men,
 As our old place forgets us two,
 Who might have turned to one thing then,
 But not again.

O lips that mine have grown into
 Like April's kissing May,
 O fervent eyelids letting through
 Those eyes the greenest of things blue,
 The bluest of things grey,

If you were I and I were you,
 How could I love you, say?
 How could the roseleaf love the rue,
 The day love nightfall and her dew,
 Though night may love the day?

You loved, it may be, more than I;
 We know not; love is hard to seize.
 And all things are not good to try;
 And lifelong love's the worst of these
 For us, Félice.

Ah, take the season and have done,
 Love well the hour and let it go:
 Two souls may sleep and wake up one,

Or dream they wake and find it so,
And then—you know.

Kiss me once hard as though a flame
Lay on my lips and made them fire;
The same lips now, and not the same;
What breath shall fill and re-inspire
A dead desire?

The old song sounds hollower in mine ear
Than thin keen sounds of dead men's speech—
A noise one hears and would not hear;
Too strong to die, too weak to reach
From wave to beach.

We stand on either side the sea,
Stretch hands, blow kisses, laugh and lean
I toward you, you toward me;
But what hears either save the keen
Grey sea between?

A year divides us, love from love,
Though you love now, though I loved then,
The gulf is strait, but deep enough;
Who shall recross, who among men
Shall cross again?

Love was a jest last year, you said,
And what lives surely, surely dies.
Even so; but now that love is dead,
Shall love rekindle from wet eyes,
From subtle sighs?

For many loves are good to see;
 Mutable loves, and loves perverse;
 But there is nothing, nor shall be,
 So sweet, so wicked, but my verse
 Can dream of worse.

For we that sing and you that love
 Know that which man may, only we.
 The rest live under us; above,
 Live the great gods in heaven, and see
 What things shall be.

So this thing is and must be so;
 For man dies, and love also dies.
 Though yet Love's ghost moves to and fro
 The sea-green mirrors of your eyes,
 And laughs, and lies.

Eyes coloured like a water-flower,
 And deeper than the green sea's glass;
 Eyes that remember one sweet hour—
 In vain we swore it should not pass;
 In vain, alas!

Ah my Félise, if love or sin,
 If shame or fear could hold it fast,
 Should we not hold it? Love wears thin,
 And they laugh well who laugh the last.
 Is it not past?

The gods, the gods are stronger; time
 Falls down before them, all men's knees
 Bow, all men's prayers and sorrows climb

Like incense towards them; yea, for these
Are gods, Félice.

Immortal are they, clothed with powers,
Not to be comforted at all;
Lords over all the fruitless hours;
Too great to appease, too high to appal,
Too far to call.

For none shall move the most high gods,
Who are most sad, being cruel; none
Shall break or take away the rods
Wherewith they scourge us, not as one
That smites a son.

By many a name of many a creed
We have called upon them, since the sands
Fell through Time's hour-glass first, a seed
Of life; and out of many lands
Have we stretched hands.

When have they heard us? who hath known
Their faces, climbed unto their feet,
Felt them and found them? Laugh or groan,
Doth heaven remurmur and repeat
Sad sounds or sweet?

Do the stars answer? in the night
Have ye found comfort? or by day
Have ye seen gods? What hope, what light,
Falls from the farthest starriest way
On you that pray?

Are the skies wet because we weep,
 Or fair because of any mirth?
 Cry out; they are gods; perchance they sleep;
 Cry; thou shalt know what prayers are worth,
 Thou dust and earth.

O earth, thou art fair; O dust, thou art great;
 O laughing lips and lips that mourn,
 Pray, till ye feel the exceeding weight
 Of God's intolerable scorn,
 Not to be borne.

Behold, there is no grief like this;
 The barren blossom of thy prayer,
 Thou shalt find out how sweet it is.
 O fools and blind, what seek ye there,
 High up in the air?

Ye must have gods, the friends of men,
 Merciful gods, compassionate,
 And these shall answer you again.
 Will ye beat always at the gate,
 Ye fools of fate?

Ye fools and blind; for this is sure,
 That all ye shall not live, but die.
 Lo, what thing have ye found endure?
 Or what thing have ye found on high
 Past the blind sky?

The ghosts of words and dusty dreams,
 Old memories, faiths infirm and dead.
 Ye fools; for which among you deems

His prayer can alter green to red
Or stones to bread?

Why should ye bear with hopes and fears
Till all these things be drawn in one,
The sound of iron-footed years,
And all the oppression that is done
Under the sun?

Ye might end surely, surely pass
Out of the multitude of things,
Under the dust, beneath the grass,
Deep in dim death, where no thought stings,
No record clings.

No memory more of love or hate,
No trouble, nothing that aspires,
No sleepless labour thwarting fate,
And thwarted; where no travail tires,
Where no faith fires.

All passes, nought that has been is,
Things good and evil have one end.
Can anything be otherwise,
Though all men swear all things would mend
With God to friend?

Can ye beat off one wave with prayer,
Can ye move mountains? bid the flower
Take flight and turn to a bird in the air?
Can ye hold fast for shine or shower
One wingless hour?

Ah, sweet, and we too, can we bring
 One sigh back, bid one smile revive?
 Can God restore one ruined thing,
 Or he who slays our souls alive
 Make dead things thrive?

Two gifts perforce he has given us yet,
 Though sad things stay and glad things fly;
 Two gifts he has given us, to forget
 All glad and sad things that go by,
 And then to die.

We know not whether death be good,
 But life at least it will not be:
 Men will stand saddening as we stood,
 Watch the same fields and skies as we
 And the same sea.

Let this be said between us here,
 One love grows green when one turns grey;
 This year knows nothing of last year;
 To-morrow has no more to say
 To yesterday.

Live and let live, as I will do,
 Love and let love, and so will I.
 But, sweet, for me no more with you:
 Not while I live, not though I die.
 Goodnight, goodbye.

A BALLAD OF BURDENS

THE burden of fair women. Vain delight,
 And love self-slain in some sweet shameful way,
 And sorrowful old age that comes by night
 As a thief comes that has no heart by day,
 And change that finds fair cheeks and leaves them grey,
 And weariness that keeps awake for hire,
 And grief that says what pleasure used to say;
 This is the end of every man's desire.

The burden of bought kisses. This is sore,
 A burden without fruit in childbearing;
 Between the nightfall and the dawn threescore,
 Threescore between the dawn and evening.
 The shuddering in thy lips, the shuddering
 In thy sad eyelids tremulous like fire,
 Makes love seem shameful and a wretched thing;
 This is the end of every man's desire.

The burden of sweet speeches. Nay, kneel down,
 Cover thy head, and weep; for verily
 These market-men that buy thy white and brown
 In the last days shall take no thought for thee.
 In the last days like earth thy face shall be,
 Yea, like sea-marsh made thick with brine and mire,
 Sad with sick leavings of the sterile sea;
 This is the end of every man's desire.

The burden of long living. Thou shalt fear
 Waking, and sleeping mourn upon thy bed;
 And say at night 'Would God the day were here',
 And say at dawn 'Would God the day were dead'.
 With weary days thou shalt be clothed and fed,
 And wear remorse of heart for thine attire,
 Pain for thy girdle and sorrow upon thine head;
 This is the end of every man's desire.

The burden of bright colours. Thou shalt see
 Gold tarnished, and the grey above the green;
 And as the thing thou seest thy face shall be,
 And no more as the thing beforetime seen.
 And thou shalt say of mercy 'It hath been',
 And living, watch the old lips and loves expire,
 And talking, tears shall take thy breath between;
 This is the end of every man's desire.

The burden of sad sayings. In that day
 Thou shalt tell all thy days and hours, and tell
 Thy times and ways and words of love, and say
 How one was dear and one desirable,
 And sweet was life to hear and sweet to smell,
 But now with lights reverse the old hours retire
 And the last hour is shod with fire from hell;
 This is the end of every man's desire.

The burden of four seasons. Rain in spring,
 White rain and wind among the tender trees;
 A summer of green sorrows gathering,
 Rank autumn in a mist of miseries,

With sad face set towards the year, that sees
The charred ash drop out of the dropping pyre,
And winter wan with many maladies;
This is the end of every man's desire.

The burden of dead faces. Out of sight
And out of love, beyond the reach of hands,
Changed in the changing of the dark and light,
They walk and weep about the barren lands
Where no seed is nor any garner stands,
Where in short breaths the doubtful days respire,
And Time's turned glass lets through the sighing sands;
This is the end of every man's desire.

The burden of much gladness. Life and lust
Forsake thee, and the face of thy delight;
And underfoot the heavy hour strews dust,
And overhead strange weathers burn and bite;
And where the red was, lo the bloodless white,
And where truth was, the likeness of a liar,
And where day was, the likeness of the night;
This is the end of every man's desire.

L'ENVOY

Princes, and ye whom pleasure quickeneth,
Heed well this rhyme before your pleasure tire;
For life is sweet, but after life is death.
This is the end of every man's desire.

ROCOCO

TAKE hands and part with laughter;
Touch lips and part with tears;
Once more and no more after,
Whatever comes with years.
We twain shall not remeasure
The ways that left us twain;
Nor crush the lees of pleasure
From sanguine grapes of pain.

We twain once well in sunder,
What will the mad gods do
For hate with me, I wonder,
Or what for love with you?
Forget them till November,
And dream there 's April yet;
Forget that I remember,
And dream that I forget.

Time found our tired love sleeping,
And kissed away his breath;
But what should we do weeping,
Though light love sleep to death?
We have drained his lips at leisure,
Till there 's not left to drain
A single sob of pleasure,
A single pulse of pain.

Dream that the lips once breathless
 Might quicken if they would;
 Say that the soul is deathless;
 Dream that the gods are good;
 Say March may wed September,
 And time divorce regret;
 But not that you remember,
 And not that I forget.

We have heard from hidden places
 What love scarce lives and hears:
 We have seen on fervent faces
 The pallor of strange tears:
 We have trod the wine-vat's treasure,
 Whence, ripe to steam and stain,
 Foams round the feet of pleasure
 The blood-red must of pain.

Remembrance may recover
 And time bring back to time
 The name of your first lover,
 The ring of my first rhyme;
 But rose-leaves of December
 The frosts of June shall fret,
 The day that you remember,
 The day that I forget.

The snake that hides and hisses
 In heaven we twain have known;
 The grief of cruel kisses,
 The joy whose mouth makes moan;

The pulse's pause and measure,
 Where in one furtive vein
 Throbs through the heart of pleasure
 The purpler blood of pain.

We have done with tears and treasons
 And love for treason's sake;
 Room for the swift new seasons,
 The years that burn and break,
 Dismantle and dismember
 Men's days and dreams, Juliette;
 For love may not remember,
 But time will not forget.

Life treads down love in flying,
 Time withers him at root;
 Bring all dead things and dying,
 Reaped sheaf and ruined fruit,
 Where, crushed by three days' pressure,
 Our three days' love lies slain;
 And earlier leaf of pleasure,
 And latter flower of pain.

Breathe close upon the ashes,
 It may be flame will leap;
 Unclose the soft close lashes,
 Lift up the lids and weep.
 Light love's extinguished ember,
 Let one tear leave it wet
 For one that you remember
 And ten that you forget.

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE FRENCH
OF VILLON

A DOUBLE BALLAD OF GOOD COUNSEL

Now take your fill of love and glee,
And after balls and banquets hie;
In the end ye'll get no good for fee,
But just heads broken by and by;
Light loves make beasts of men that sigh;
They changed the faith of Solomon,
And left not Samson lights to spy;
Good luck has he that deals with none!

Sweet Orpheus, lord of minstrelsy,
For this with lute and pipe came nigh
The danger of the dog's heads three
That ravening at hell's door doth lie;
Fain was Narcissus, fair and shy,
For love's love lightly lost and won,
In a deep well to drown and die;
Good luck has he that deals with none!

Sardana, flower of chivalry,
Who conquered Crete with horn and cry,
For this was fain a maid to be
And learn with girls the thread to ply;
King David, wise in prophecy,
Forgot the fear of God for one
Seen washing either shapely thigh;
Good luck has he that deals with none!

For this did Amnon, craftily
 Feigning to eat of cakes of rye,
 Deflower his sister fair to see,
 Which was foul incest; and hereby
 Was Herod moved, it is no lie,
 To lop the head of Baptist John
 For dance and jig and psaltery;
 Good luck has he that deals with none!

Next of myself I tell, poor me,
 How thrashed like clothes at wash was I
 Stark naked, I must needs agree;
 Who made me eat so sour a pie
 But Katherine of Vaucelles? thereby,
 Noé took third part of that fun;
 Such wedding-gloves are ill to buy;
 Good luck has he that deals with none!

But for that young man fair and free
 To pass those young maids lightly by,
 Nay, would you burn him quick, not he;
 Like broom-horsed witches though he fry,
 They are sweet as civet in his eye;
 But trust them, and you're fooled anon;
 For white or brown, and low or high,
 Good luck has he that deals with none!



THE EPITAPH IN FORM OF A BALLAD

*Which Villon made for himself and his comrades, expecting to be
hanged along with them*

MEN, brother men, that after us yet live,
Let not your hearts too hard against us be;
For if some pity of us poor men ye give,
The sooner God shall take of you pity.
Here are we five or six strung up, you see,
And here the flesh that all too well we fed
Bit by bit eaten and rotten, rent and shred,
And we the bones grow dust and ash withal;
Let no man laugh at us discomforted,
But pray to God that he forgive us all.

If we call on you, brothers, to forgive,
Ye should not hold our prayer in scorn, though we
Were slain by law; ye know that all alive
Have not wit alway to walk righteously;
Make therefore intercession heartily
With him that of a virgin's womb was bred,
That his grace be not as a dry well-head
For us, nor let hell's thunder on us fall;
We are dead, let no man harry or vex us dead,
But pray to God that he forgive us all.

The rain has washed and laundered us all five,
And the sun dried and blackened; yea, perdie,
Ravens and pies with beaks that rend and rive
Have dug our eyes out, and plucked off for fee

Our beards and eyebrows; never are we free,
 Not once, to rest; but here and there still sped,
 Drive at its wild will by the wind's change led,
 More pecked of birds than fruits on garden-wall;
 Men, for God's love, let no gibe here be said,
 But pray to God that he forgive us all.

Prince Jesus, that of all art lord and head,
 Keep us, that hell be not our bitter bed;
 We have nought to do in such a master's hall.
 Be not ye therefore of our fellowhead,
 But pray to God that he forgive us all.



THE TRIUMPH OF TIME

BEFORE our lives divide for ever,
 While time is with us and hands are free,
 (Time, swift to fasten and swift to sever
 Hand from hand, as we stand by the sea)
 I will say no word that a man might say
 Whose whole life's love goes down in a day;
 For this could never have been; and never,
 Though the gods and the years relent, shall be.

Is it worth a tear, is it worth an hour,
 To think of things that are well outworn?
 Of fruitless husk and fugitive flower,
 The dream foregone and the deed forborne?
 Though joy be done with and grief be vain,
 Time shall not sever us wholly in twain;
 Earth is not spoilt for a single shower;
 But the rain has ruined the ungrown corn.

It will grow not again, this fruit of my heart,
 Smitten with sunbeams, ruined with rain.
 The singing seasons divide and depart,
 Winter and summer depart in twain.
 It will grow not again, it is ruined at root,
 The bloodlike blossom, the dull red fruit;
 Though the heart yet sickens, the lips yet smart,
 With sullen savour of poisonous pain.

I have given no man of my fruit to eat;
 I trod the grapes, I have drunken the wine.
 Had you eaten and drunken and found it sweet,
 This wild new growth of the corn and vine,
 This wine and bread without lees or leaven,
 We had grown as gods, as the gods in heaven,
 Souls fair to look upon, goodly to greet,
 One splendid spirit, your soul and mine.

In the change of years, in the coil of things,
 In the clamour and rumour of life to be,
 We, drinking love at the furthest springs,
 Covered with love as a covering tree,
 We had grown as gods, as the gods above,
 Filled from the heart to the lips with love,
 Held fast in his hands, clothed warm with his wings,
 O love, my love, had you loved but me!

We had stood as the sure stars stand, and moved
 As the moon moves, loving the world; and seen
 Grief collapse as a thing disproved,
 Death consume as a thing unclean.
 Twain halves of a perfect heart, made fast
 Soul to soul while the years fell past;
 Had you loved me once, as you have not loved;
 Had the chance been with us that has not been.

I have put my days and dreams out of mind,
 Days that are over, dreams that are done.
 Though we seek life through, we shall surely find
 There is none of them clear to us now, not one.

But clear are these things; the grass and the sand,
Where, sure as the eyes reach, ever at hand,
With lips wide open and face burnt blind,
The strong sea-daisies feast on the sun.

The low downs lean to the sea; the stream,
One loose thin pulseless tremulous vein,
Rapid and vivid and dumb as a dream,
Works downward, sick of the sun and the rain;
No wind is rough with the rank rare flowers;
The sweet sea, mother of loves and hours,
Shudders and shines as the grey winds gleam,
Turning her smile to a fugitive pain.

Mother of loves that are swift to fade,
Mother of mutable winds and hours.
A barren mother, a mother-maid,
Cold and clean as her faint salt flowers.
I would we twain were even as she,
Lost in the night and the light of the sea,
Where faint sounds falter and wan beams wade,
Break, and are broken, and shed into showers.

The loves and hours of the life of a man,
They are swift and sad, being born of the sea.
Hours that rejoice and regret for a span,
Born with a man's breath, mortal as he;
Loves that are lost ere they come to birth,
Weeds of the wave, without fruit upon earth.
I lose what I long for, save what I can,
My love, my love, and no love for me!

It is not much that a man can save
 On the sands of life, in the straits of time,
 Who swims in sight of the great third wave
 That never a swimmer shall cross or climb.
 Some waif washed up with the strays and spars
 That ebb-tide shows to the shore and the stars;
 Weed from the water, grass from a grave,
 A broken blossom, a ruined rhyme.

There will no man do for your sake, I think,
 What I would have done for the least word said.
 I had wrung life dry for your lips to drink,
 Broken it up for your daily bread:
 Body for body and blood for blood,
 As the flow of the full sea risen to flood
 That yearns and trembles before it sink,
 I had given, and lain down for you, glad and dead.

Yea, hope at highest and all her fruit,
 And time at fullest and all his dower,
 I had given you surely, and life to boot,
 Were we once made one for a single hour.
 But now, you are twain, you are cloven apart,
 Flesh of his flesh, but heart of my heart;
 And deep in one is the bitter root,
 And sweet for one is the lifelong flower.

To have died if you cared I should die for you, clung
 To my life if you bade me, played my part
 As it pleased you—these were the thoughts that stung,
 The dreams that smote with a keener dart

Than shafts of love or arrows of death;
 These were but as fire is, dust, or breath,
 Or poisonous foam on the tender tongue
 Of the little snakes that eat my heart.

I wish we were dead together to-day,
 Lost sight of, hidden away out of sight,
 Clapsed and clothed in the cloven clay,
 Out of the world's way, out of the light,
 Out of the ages of worldly weather,
 Forgotten of all men altogether,
 As the world's first dead, taken wholly away,
 Made one with death, filled full of the night.

How we should slumber, how we should sleep,
 Far in the dark with the dreams and the dews!
 And dreaming, grow to each other, and weep,
 Laugh low, live softly, murmur and muse;
 Yea, and it may be, struck through by the dream,
 Feel the dust quicken and quiver, and seem
 Alive as of old to the lips, and leap
 Spirit to spirit as lovers use.

Sick dreams and sad of a dull delight;
 For what shall it profit when men are dead
 To have dreamed, to have loved with the whole soul's might,
 To have looked for day when the day was fled?
 Let come what will, there is one thing worth,
 To have had fair love in the life upon earth:
 To have held love safe till the day grew night,
 While skies had colour and lips were red.

Would I lose you now? would I take you then,
 If I lose you now that my heart has need?
 And come what may after death to men,
 What thing worth this will the dead years breed?
 Lose life, lose all; but at least I know,
 O sweet life's love, having loved you so,
 Had I reached you on earth, I should lose not again,
 In death nor life, nor in dream or deed.

Yea, I know this well: were you once sealed mine,
 Mine in the blood's beat, mine in the breath,
 Mixed into me as honey in wine,
 Not time, that sayeth and gainsayeth,
 Nor all strong things had severed us then;
 Not wrath of gods, nor wisdom of men,
 Nor all things earthly, nor all divine,
 Nor joy nor sorrow, nor life nor death.

I had grown pure as the dawn and the dew,
 You had grown strong as the sun or the sea.
 But none shall triumph a whole life through:
 For Death is one, and the Fates are three.
 At the door of life, by the gate of breath,
 There are worse things waiting for men than death;
 Death could not sever my soul and you,
 As these have severed your soul from me.

You have chosen and clung to the chance they sent you,
 Life sweet as perfume and pure as prayer.
 But will it not one day in heaven repent you?
 Will they solace you wholly, the days that were?

Will you lift up your eyes between sadness and bliss,
 Meet mine, and see where the great love is,
 And tremble and turn and be changed? Content you;
 The gate is strait; I shall not be there.

But you, had you chosen, had you stretched hand,
 Had you seen good such a thing were done,
 I too might have stood with the souls that stand
 In the sun's sight, clothed with the light of the sun;
 But who now on earth need care how I live?
 Have the high gods anything left to give,
 Save dust and laurels and gold and sand?
 Which gifts are goodly; but I will none.

O all fair lovers about the world,
 There is none of you, none, that shall comfort me.
 My thoughts are as dead things, wrecked and whirled
 Round and round in a gulf of the sea;
 And still, through the sound and the straining stream,
 Through the coil and chafe, they gleam in a dream,
 The bright fine lips so cruelly curled,
 And strange swift eyes where the soul sits free.

Free, without pity, withheld from woe,
 Ignorant; fair as the eyes are fair.
 Would I have you change now, change at a blow,
 Startled and stricken, awake and aware?
 Yea, if I could, would I have you see
 My very love of you filling me,
 And know my soul to the quick, as I know
 The likeness and look of your throat and hair?

I shall not change you. Nay, though I might,
 Would I change my sweet one love with a word?
 I had rather your hair should change in a night,
 Clear now as the plume of a black bright bird;
 Your face fail suddenly, cease, turn grey,
 Die as a leaf that dies in a day.
 I will keep my soul in a place out of sight,
 Far off, where the pulse of it is not heard.

Far off it walks, in a bleak blown space,
 Full of the sound of the sorrow of years.
 I have woven a veil for the weeping face,
 Whose lips have drunken the wine of tears;
 I have found a way for the failing feet,
 A place for slumber and sorrow to meet;
 There is no rumour about the place,
 Nor light, nor any that sees or hears.

I have hidden my soul out of sight, and said
 ‘Let none take pity upon thee, none
 Comfort thy crying: for lo, thou art dead,
 Lie still now, safe out of sight of the sun.
 Have I not built thee a grave, and wrought
 Thy grave-clothes on thee of grievous thought,
 With soft spun verses and tears unshed,
 And sweet light visions of things undone?

‘I have given thee garments and balm and myrrh,
 And gold, and beautiful burial things.
 But thou, be at peace now, make no stir;
 Is not thy grave as a royal king’s?

Fret not thyself though the end were sore;
 Sleep, be patient, vex me no more.
 Sleep; what hast thou to do with her?
 The eyes that weep, with the mouth that sings?’

Where the dead red leaves of the years lie rotten,
 The cold old crimes and the deeds thrown by,
 The misconceived and the misbegotten,
 I would find a sin to do ere I die,
 Sure to dissolve and destroy me all through,
 That would set you higher in heaven, serve you
 And leave you happy, when clean forgotten,
 As a dead man out of mind, am I.

Your lithe hands draw me, your face burns through me,
 I am swift to follow you, keen to see;
 But love lacks might to redeem or undo me;
 As I have been, I know I shall surely be;
 ‘What should such fellows as I do?’ Nay,
 My part were worse if I chose to play;
 For the worst is this after all; if they knew me,
 Not a soul upon earth would pity me.

And I play not for pity of these; but you,
 If you saw with your soul what man am I,
 You would praise me at least that my soul all through
 Clove to you, loathing the lives that lie;
 The souls and lips that are bought and sold,
 The smiles of silver and kisses of gold,
 The lapdog loves that whine as they chew,
 The little lovers that curse and cry.

There are fairer women, I hear; that may be;
 But I, that I love you and find you fair,
 Who are more than fair in my eyes if they be,
 Do the high gods know or the great gods care?
 Though the swords in my heart for one were seven,
 Should the iron hollow of doubtful heaven,
 That knows not itself whether night-time or day be,
 Reverberate words and a foolish prayer?

I will go back to the great sweet mother,
 Mother and lover of men, the sea.
 I will go down to her, I and none other,
 Close with her, kiss her and mix her with me;
 Cling to her, strive with her, hold her fast:
 O fair white mother, in days long past
 Born without sister, born without brother,
 Set free my soul as thy soul is free.

O fair green-girdled mother of mine,
 Sea, that art clothed with the sun and the rain,
 Thy sweet hard kisses are strong like wine,
 Thy large embraces are keen like pain.
 Save me and hide me with all thy waves,
 Find me one grave of thy thousand graves,
 Those pure cold populous graves of thine
 Wrought without hand in a world without stain.

I shall sleep, and move with the moving ships,
 Change as the winds change, veer in the tide;
 My lips will feast on the foam of thy lips,
 I shall rise with thy rising, with thee subside;

Sleep, and not know if she be, if she were,
 Filled full with life to the eyes and hair,
 As a rose is fulfilled to the roseleaf tips
 With splendid summer and perfume and pride.

This woven raiment of nights and days,
 Were it once cast off and unwound from me,
 Naked and glad would I walk in thy ways,
 Alive and aware of thy ways and thee;
 Clear of the whole world, hidden at home,
 Clothed with the green and crowned with the foam,
 A pulse of the life of thy straits and bays,
 A vein in the heart of the streams of the sea.

Fair mother, fed with the lives of men,
 Thou art subtle and cruel of heart, men say.
 Thou hast taken, and shalt not render again;
 Thou art full of thy dead, and cold as they.
 But death is the worst that comes of thee;
 Thou art fed with our dead, O mother, O sea,
 But when hast thou fed on our hearts? or when,
 Having given us love, hast thou taken away?

O tender-hearted, O perfect lover,
 Thy lips are bitter, and sweet thine heart.
 The hopes that hurt and the dreams that hover,
 Shall they not vanish away and apart?
 But thou, thou art sure, thou art older than earth;
 Thou art strong for death and fruitful of birth;
 Thy depths conceal and thy gulfs discover;
 From the first thou wert; in the end thou art.

And grief shall endure not for ever, I know.

As things that are not shall these things be;
 We shall live through seasons of sun and of snow,
 And none be grievous as this to me.
 We shall hear, as one in a trance that hears,
 The sound of time, the rhyme of the years;
 Wrecked hope and passionate pain will grow
 As tender things of a spring-tide sea.

Sea-fruit that swings in the waves that hiss,
 Drowned gold and purple and royal rings.
 And all time past, was it all for this?

Times unforgotten, and treasures of things?
 Swift years of liking and sweet long laughter,
 That wist not well of the years thereafter
 Till love woke, smitten at heart by a kiss,
 With lips that trembled and trailing wings?

There lived a singer in France of old
 By the tideless dolorous midland sea.
 In a land of sand and ruin and gold
 There shone one woman, and none but she.
 And finding life for her love's sake fail,
 Being fain to see her, he bade set sail,
 Touched land, and saw her as life grew cold,
 And praised God, seeing; and so died he.

Died, praising God for his gift and grace:
 For she bowed down to him weeping, and said
 'Live'; and her tears were shed on his face
 Or ever the life in his face was shed.

The sharp tears fell through her hair, and stung
 Once, and her close lips touched him and clung
 Once, and grew one with his lips for a space;
 And so drew back, and the man was dead.

O brother, the gods were good to you.
 Sleep, and be glad while the world endures.
 Be well content as the years wear through;
 Give thanks for life, and the loves and lures;
 Give thanks for life, O brother, and death,
 For the sweet last sound of her feet, her breath,
 For gifts she gave you, gracious and few,
 Tears and kisses, that lady of yours.

Rest, and be glad of the gods; but I,
 How shall I praise them, or how take rest?
 There is not room under all the sky
 For me that know not of worst or best,
 Dream or desire of the days before,
 Sweet things or bitterness, any more.
 Love will not come to me now though I die,
 As love came close to you, breast to breast.

I shall never be friends again with roses;
 I shall loathe sweet tunes, where a note grown strong
 Relents and recoils, and climbs and closes,
 As a wave of the sea turned back by song.
 There are sounds where the soul's delight takes fire,
 Face to face with its own desire;
 A delight that rebels, a desire that reposes;
 I shall hate sweet music my whole life long.

The pulse of war and passion of wonder,
 The heavens that murmur, the sounds that shine,
 The stars that sing and the loves that thunder,
 The music burning at heart like wine,
 An armed archangel whose hands raise up
 All senses mixed in the spirit's cup
 Till flesh and spirit are molten in sunder—
 These things are over, and no more mine.

These were a part of the playing I heard
 Once, ere my love and my heart were at strife;
 Love that sings and hath wings as a bird,
 Balm of the wound and heft of the knife.
 Fairer than earth is the sea, and sleep
 Than overwatching of eyes that weep,
 Now time has done with his one sweet word,
 The wine and leaven of lovely life.

I shall go my ways, tread out my measure,
 Fill the days of my daily breath
 With fugitive things not good to treasure,
 Do as the world doth, say as it saith;
 But if we had loved each other—O sweet,
 Had you felt, lying under the palms of your feet,
 The heart of my heart, beating harder with pleasure
 To feel you tread it to dust and death—

Ah, had I not taken my life up and given
 All that life gives and the years let go,
 The wine and honey, the balm and leaven,
 The dreams reared high and the hopes brought low?

Come life, come death, not a word be said;
Should I lose you living, and vex you dead?
I never shall tell you on earth; and in heaven,
If I cry to you then, will you hear or know?



ITYLUS

SWALLOW, my sister, O sister swallow,
 How can thine heart be full of the spring?
 A thousand summers are over and dead.
 What hast thou found in the spring to follow?
 What hast thou found in thine heart to sing?
 What wilt thou do when the summer is shed?

O swallow, sister, O fair swift swallow,
 Why wilt thou fly after spring to the south,
 The soft south whither thine heart is set?
 Shall not the grief of the old time follow?
 Shall not the song thereof cleave to thy mouth?
 Hast thou forgotten ere I forget?

Sister, my sister, O fleet sweet swallow,
 Thy way is long to the sun and the south;
 But I, fulfilled of my heart's desire,
 Shedding my song upon height, upon hollow,
 From tawny body and sweet small mouth
 Feed the heart of the night with fire.

I the nightingale all spring through,
 O swallow, sister, O changing swallow,
 All spring through till the spring be done,
 Clothed with the light of the night on the dew,
 Sing, while the hours and the wild birds follow,
 Take flight and follow and find the sun.

Sister, my sister, O soft light swallow,
 Though all things feast in the spring's guest-chamber,
 How hast thou heart to be glad thereof yet?
 For where thou fliest I shall not follow,
 Till life forget and death remember,
 Till thou remember and I forget.

Swallow, my sister, O singing swallow,
 I know not how thou hast heart to sing.
 Hast thou the heart? is it all past over?
 Thy lord the summer is good to follow,
 And fair the feet of thy lover the spring:
 But what wilt thou say to the spring thy lover?

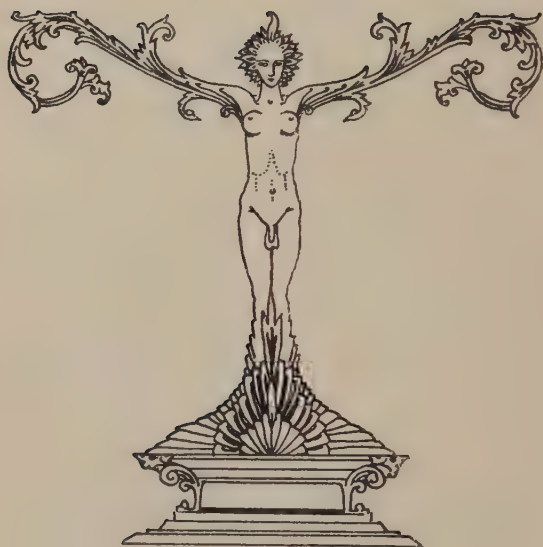
O swallow, sister, O fleeting swallow,
 My heart in me is a molten ember
 And over my head the waves have met.
 But thou wouldst tarry or I would follow,
 Could I forget or thou remember,
 Couldst thou remember and I forget.

O sweet stray sister, O shifting swallow,
 The heart's division divideth us.
 Thy heart is light as a leaf of a tree;
 But mine goes forth among sea-gulfs hollow
 To the place of the slaying of Itylus,
 The feast of Daulis, the Thracian sea.

O swallow, sister, O rapid swallow,
 I pray thee sing not a little space.
 Are not the roofs and the lintels wet?

The woven web that was plain to follow,
 The small slain body, the flowerlike face,
 Can I remember if thou forget?

O sister, sister, thy first-begotten!
 The hands that cling and the feet that follow,
 The voice of the child's blood crying yet
Who hath remembered me? who hath forgotten?
 Thou hast forgotten, O summer swallow,
 But the world shall end when I forget.



HYMN TO PROSERPINE

(AFTER THE PROCLAMATION IN ROME OF THE
CHRISTIAN FAITH)

Vicisti, Galilæe

I HAVE lived long enough, having seen one thing, that
love hath an end;

Goddess and maiden and queen, be near me now and
befriend.

Thou art more than the day or the morrow, the seasons
that laugh or that weep;

For these give joy and sorrow; but thou, Proserpina, sleep.
Sweet is the treading of wine, and sweet the feet of the
dove;

But a goodlier gift is thine than foam of the grapes or love.
Yea, is not even Apollo, with hair and harpstring of gold,
A bitter God to follow, a beautiful God to behold?

I am sick of singing: the bays burn deep and chafe: I am
fain

To rest a little from praise and grievous pleasure and
pain.

For the Gods we know not of, who give us our daily
breath,

We know they are cruel as love or life, and lovely as
death.

O Gods dethroned and deceased, cast forth, wiped out
in a day!

From your wrath is the world released, redeemed from
your chains, men say.

New Gods are crowned in the city; their flowers have
 broken your rods;
 They are merciful, clothed with pity, the young com-
 passionate Gods.
 But for me their new device is barren, the days are bare;
 Things long past over suffice, and men forgotten that
 were.
 Time and the Gods are at strife; ye dwell in the midst
 thereof,
 Draining a little life from the barren breasts of love.
 I say to you, cease, take rest; yea, I say to you all, be at
 peace,
 Till the bitter milk of her breast and the barren bosom
 shall cease.
 Wilt thou yet take all, Galilean? but these thou shalt not
 take,
 The laurel, the palms and the pæan, the breasts of the
 nymphs in the brake;
 Breasts more soft than a dove's, that tremble with
 tenderer breath;
 And all the wings of the Loves, and all the joy before
 death;
 All the feet of the hours that sound as a single lyre,
 Dropped and deep in the flowers, with strings that flicker
 like fire.
 More than these wilt thou give, things fairer than all
 these things?
 Nay, for a little we live, and life hath mutable wings.
 A little while and we die; shall life not thrive as it may?
 For no man under the sky lives twice, outliving his day.
 And grief is a grievous thing, and a man hath enough
 of his tears:



Why should he labour, and bring fresh grief to blacken
his years?

Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has
grown grey from thy breath;

We have drunken of things Lethean, and fed on the
fullness of death.

Laurel is green for a season, and love is sweet for a day;
But love grows bitter with treason, and laurel outlives
not May.

Sleep, shall we sleep after all? for the world is not sweet
in the end;

For the old faiths loosen and fall, the new years ruin and
rend.

Fate is a sea without shore, and the soul is a rock that
abides;

But her ears are vexed with the roar and her face with
the foam of the tides.

O lips that the live blood faints in, the leavings of racks
and rods!

O ghastly glories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted Gods!
Though all men abase them before you in spirit, and all
knees bend,

I kneel not neither adore you, but standing, look to the
end.

All delicate days and pleasant, all spirits and sorrows are
cast

Far out with the foam of the present that sweeps to the
surf of the past:

Where beyond the extreme sea-wall, and between the
remote sea-gates,

Waste water washes, and tall ships founder, and deep
death waits:

Where, mighty with deepening sides, clad about with
 the seas as with wings,
 And impelled of invisible tides, and fulfilled of unspeak-
 able things,
 White-eyed and poisonous-finned, shark-toothed and
 serpentine-curved,
 Rolls, under the whitening wind of the future, the wave
 of the world.
 The depths stand naked in sunder behind it, the storms
 flee away;
 In the hollow before it the thunder is taken and snared as
 a prey;
 In its sides is the north-wind bound; and its salt is of all
 men's tears;
 With light of ruin, and sound of changes, and pulse of
 years:
 With travail of day after day, and with trouble of hour
 upon hour;
 And bitter as blood is the spray; and the crests are as
 fangs that devour;
 And its vapour and storm of its steam as the sighing of
 spirits to be;
 And its noise as the noise in a dream; and its depth as
 the roots of the sea:
 And the height of its heads as the height of the utmost
 stars of the air:
 And the ends of the earth at the might thereof tremble,
 and time is made bare.
 Will ye bridle the deep sea with reins, will ye chasten the
 high sea with rods?
 Will ye take her to chain her with chains, who is older
 than all ye Gods?

All ye as a wind shall go by, as a fire shall ye pass and
 be past;
 Ye are Gods, and behold, ye shall die, and the waves be
 upon you at last.
 In the darkness of time, in the deeps of the years, in the
 changes of things,
 Ye shall sleep as a slain man sleeps, and the world shall
 forget you for kings.
 Though the feet of thine high priests tread where thy
 lords and our forefathers trod,
 Though these that were Gods are dead, and thou being
 dead art a God,
 Though before thee the throned Cytherean be fallen, and
 hidden her head,
 Yet thy kingdom shall pass, Galilean, thy dead shall go
 down to thee dead.
 Of the maiden thy mother men sing as a goddess with
 grace clad around;
 Thou art throned where another was king; where another
 was queen she is crowned.
 Yea, once we had sight of another: but now she is queen,
 say these.
 Not as thine, not as thine was our mother, a blossom of
 flowering seas,
 Clothed round with the world's desire as with raiment,
 and fair as the foam,
 And fleeter than kindled fire, and a goddess, and mother
 of Rome.
 For thine came pale and a maiden, and sister to sorrow;
 but ours,
 Her deep hair heavily laden with odour and colour of
 flowers,

White rose of the rose-white water, a silver splendour, a
 flame,
 Bent down unto us that besought her, and earth grew
 sweet with her name.
 For thine came weeping, a slave among slaves, and
 rejected; but she
 Came flushed from the full-flushed wave, and imperial,
 her foot on the sea.
 And the wonderful waters knew her, the winds and the
 viewless ways,
 And the roses grew rosier, and bluer the sea-blue stream
 of the bays.
 Ye are fallen, our lords, by what token? we wist that ye
 should not fall.
 Ye were all so fair that are broken; and one more fair
 than ye all.
 But I turn to her still, having seen she shall surely abide
 in the end;
 Goddess and maiden and queen, be near me now and
 befriend.
 O daughter of earth, of my mother, her crown and
 blossom of birth,
 I am also, I also, thy brother; I go as I came unto
 earth.
 In the night where thine eyes are as moons are in heaven,
 the night where thou art,
 Where the silence is more than all tunes, where sleep
 overflows from the heart,
 Where the poppies are sweet as the rose in our world,
 and the red rose is white,
 And the wind falls faint as it blows with the fume of the
 flowers of the night,

And the murmur of spirits that sleep in the shadow of
 Gods from afar
 Grows dim in thine ears and deep as the deep dim soul
 of a star,
 In the sweet low light of thy face, under heavens untrod
 by the sun,
 Let my soul with their souls find place, and forget what
 is done and undone.
 Thou art more than the Gods who number the days of
 our temporal breath;
 For these give labour and slumber; but thou, Proserpina,
 death.
 Therefore now at thy feet I abide for a season in silence.
 I know
 I shall die as my fathers died, and sleep as they sleep;
 even so.
 For the glass of the years is brittle wherein we gaze for
 a span;
 A little sòul for a little bears up this corpse which is man.¹
 So long I endure, no longer; and laugh not again, neither
 weep.
 For there is no God found stronger than death; and
 death is a sleep.

¹ ψυχάριον εἰ βαστάζον νεκρόν

ΕΠΙΚΤΕΤΟΣ

DOLORS

(NOTRE-DAME DES SEPT DOULEURS)

COLD eyelids that hide like a jewel
 Hard eyes that grow soft for an hour;
 The heavy white limbs, and the cruel
 Red mouth like a venomous flower;
 When these are gone by with their glories,
 What shall rest of thee then, what remain,
 O mystic and sombre Dolores,
 Our Lady of Pain?

Seven sorrows the priests give their Virgin;
 But thy sins, which are seventy times seven,
 Seven ages would fail thee to purge in,
 And then they would haunt thee in heaven:
 Fierce midnights and famishing morrows,
 And the loves that complete and control
 All the joys of the flesh, all the sorrows
 That wear out the soul.

O garment not golden but gilded,
 O garden where all men may dwell,
 O tower not of ivory, but builded
 By hands that reach heaven from hell;
 O mystical rose of the mire,
 O house not of gold but of gain,
 O house of unquenchable fire,
 Our Lady of Pain!

O lips full of lust and of laughter,
 Curled snakes that are fed from my breast,
 Bite hard, lest remembrance come after
 And press with new lips where you pressed.
 For my heart too springs up at the pressure,
 Mine eyelids too moisten and burn;
 Ah, feed me and fill me with pleasure,
 Ere pain come in turn.

In yesterday's reach and to-morrow's,
 Out of sight though they lie of to-day,
 There have been and there yet shall be sorrows
 That smite not and bite not in play.
 The life and the love thou despisest,
 These hurt us indeed, and in vain,
 O wise among women, and wisest,
 Our Lady of Pain.

Who gave thee thy wisdom? what stories
 That stung thee, what visions that smote?
 Wert thou pure and a maiden, Dolores,
 When desire took thee first by the throat?
 What bud was the shell of a blossom
 That all men may smell to and pluck?
 What milk fed thee first at what bosom?
 What sins gave thee suck?

We shift and bedeck and bedrape us,
 Thou art noble and nude and antique;
 Libitina thy mother, Priapus
 Thy father, a Tuscan and Greek.

We play with light loves in the portal,
 And wince and relent and refrain;
 Loves die, and we know thee immortal,
 Our Lady of Pain.

Fruits fail and love dies and time ranges;
 Thou art fed with perpetual breath,
 And alive after infinite changes,
 And fresh from the kisses of death;
 Of languors rekindled and rallied,
 Of barren delights and unclean,
 Things monstrous and fruitless, a pallid
 And poisonous queen.

Could you hurt me, sweet lips, though I hurt you?
 Men touch them, and change in a trice
 The lilies and languors of virtue
 For the raptures and roses of vice;
 Those lie where thy foot on the floor is,
 These crown and caress thee and chain,
 O splendid and sterile Dolores,
 Our Lady of Pain.

There are sins it may be to discover,
 There are deeds it may be to delight.
 What new work wilt thou find for thy lover,
 What new passions for daytime or night?
 What spells that they know not a word of
 Whose lives are as leaves overblown?
 What tortures undreamt of, unheard of,
 Unwritten, unknown?

Ah, beautiful passionate body
 That never has ached with a heart!
 On thy mouth though the kisses are bloody,
 Though they sting till it shudder and smart,
 More kind than the love we adore is,
 They hurt not the heart or the brain,
 O bitter and tender Dolores,
 Our Lady of Pain.

As our kisses relax and redouble,
 From the lips and the foam and the fangs
 Shall no new sin be born for men's trouble,
 No dream of impossible pangs?
 With the sweet of the sins of old ages
 Wilt thou satiate thy soul as of yore?
 Too sweet is the rind, say the sages,
 Too bitter the core.

Hast thou told all thy secrets the last time,
 And bared all thy beauties to one?
 Ah, where shall we go then for pastime,
 If the worst that can be has been done?
 But sweet as the rind was the core is;
 We are fain of thee still, we are fain,
 O sanguine and subtle Dolores,
 Our Lady of Pain.

By the hunger of change and emotion,
 By the thirst of unbearable things,
 By despair, the twin-born of devotion,
 By the pleasure that winces and stings,

The delight that consumes the desire,
 The desire that outruns the delight,
 By the cruelty deaf as a fire
 And blind as the night,

By the ravenous teeth that have smitten
 Through the kisses that blossom and bud,
 By the lips intertwined and bitten
 Till the foam has a savour of blood,
 By the pulse as it rises and falters,
 By the hands as they slacken and strain,
 I adjure thee, respond from thine altars,
 Our Lady of Pain.

Wilt thou smile as a woman disdaining
 The light fire in the veins of a boy?
 But he comes to thee sad, without feigning,
 Who has wearied of sorrow and joy;
 Less careful of labour and glory
 Than the elders whose hair has uncurled:
 And young, but with fancies as hoary
 And grey as the world.

I have passed from the outermost portal
 To the shrine where a sin is a prayer;
 What care though the service be mortal?
 O our Lady of Torture, what care?
 All thine the last wine that I pour is,
 The last in the chalice we drain,
 O fierce and luxurious Dolores,
 Our Lady of Pain.

All thine the new wine of desire,
 The fruit of four lips as they clung
 Till the hair and the eyelids took fire,
 The foam of a serpentine tongue,
 The froth of the serpents of pleasure,
 More salt than the foam of the sea,
 Now felt as a flame, now at leisure
 As wine shed for me.

Ah thy people, thy children, thy chosen,
 Marked cross from the womb and perverse!
 They have found out the secret to cozen
 The gods that constrain us and curse;
 They alone, they are wise, and none other;
 Give me place, even me, in their train,
 O my sister, my spouse, and my mother,
 Our Lady of Pain.

For the crown of our life as it closes
 Is darkness, the fruit thereof dust;
 No thorns go as deep as a rose's,
 And love is more cruel than lust.
 Time turns the old days to derision,
 Our loves into corpses or wives;
 And marriage and death and division
 Make barren our lives.

And pale from the past we draw nigh thee,
 And satiate with comfortless hours;
 And we know thee, how all men belie thee,
 And we gather the fruit of thy flowers;

The passion that slays and recovers,
 The pangs and the kisses that rain
 On the lips and the limbs of thy lovers,
 Our Lady of Pain.

The desire of thy furious embraces
 Is more than the wisdom of years,
 On the blossom though blood lie in traces,
 Though the foliage be sodden with tears.
 For the lords in whose keeping the door is
 That opens on all who draw breath
 Gave the cypress to love, my Dolores,
 The myrtle to death.

And they laughed, changing hands in the measure,
 And they mixed and made peace after strife;
 Pain melted in tears, and was pleasure;
 Death tingled with blood, and was life.
 Like lovers they melted and tingled,
 In the dusk of thine innermost fane;
 In the darkness they murmured and mingled,
 Our Lady of Pain.

In a twilight where virtues are vices,
 In thy chapels, unknown of the sun,
 To a tune that enthralls and entices,
 They were wed, and the twain were as one.
 For the tune from thine altar hath sounded
 Since God bade the world's work begin,
 And the fume of thine incense abounded,
 To sweeten the sin.

Love listens, and paler than ashes,
 Through his curls as the crown on them slips,
 Lifts languid wet eyelids and lashes,
 And laughs with insatiable lips.
 Thou shalt hush him with heavy caresses,
 With music that scares the profane;
 Thou shalt darken his eyes with thy tresses,
 Our Lady of Pain.

Thou shalt blind his bright eyes though he wrestle,
 Thou shalt chain his light limbs though he strive;
 In his lips all thy serpents shall nestle,
 In his hands all thy cruelties thrive.
 In the daytime thy voice shall go through him,
 In his dreams he shall feel thee and ache;
 Thou shalt kindle by night and subdue him
 Asleep and awake.

Thou shalt touch and make redder his roses
 With juice not of fruit nor of bud;
 When the sense in the spirit reposes,
 Thou shalt quicken the soul through the blood.
 Thine, thine the one grace we implore is,
 Who would live and not languish or feign,
 O sleepless and deadly Dolores,
 Our Lady of Pain.

Dost thou dream, in a respite of slumber,
 In a lull of the fires of thy life,
 Of the days without name, without number,
 When thy will stung the world into strife;

When, a goddess, the pulse of thy passion
 Smote kings as they revelled in Rome;
 And they hailed thee re-risen, O Thalassian,
 Foam-white, from the foam?

When thy lips had such lovers to flatter;
 When the city lay red from thy rods,
 And thine hands were as arrows to scatter
 The children of change and their gods;
 When the blood of thy foemen made fervent
 A sand never moist from the main,
 As one smote them, their lord and thy servant,
 Our Lady of Pain.

On sands by the storm never shaken,
 Nor wet from the washing of tides;
 Nor by foam of the waves overtaken,
 Nor winds that the thunder bestrides;
 But red from the print of thy paces,
 Made smooth for the world and its lords,
 Ringed round with a flame of fair faces,
 And splendid with swords.

There the gladiator, pale for thy pleasure,
 Drew bitter and perilous breath;
 There torments laid hold on the treasure
 Of limbs too delicious for death;
 When thy gardens were lit with live torches;
 When the world was a steed for thy rein;
 When the nations lay prone in thy porches,
 Our Lady of Pain.

When, with flame all around him aspirant,
 Stood flushed, as a harp-player stands,
 The implacable beautiful tyrant,
 Rose-crowned, having death in his hands;
 And a sound as the sound of loud water
 Smote far through the flight of the fires,
 And mixed with the lightning of slaughter
 A thunder of lyres.

Dost thou dream of what was and no more is,
 The old kingdoms of earth and the kings?
 Dost thou hunger for these things, Dolores,
 For these, in a world of new things?
 But thy bosom no fasts could emaciate,
 No hunger compel to complain
 Those lips that no bloodshed could satiate,
 Our Lady of Pain.

As of old when the world's heart was lighter,
 Through thy garments the grace of thee glows,
 The white wealth of thy body made whiter
 By the blushes of amorous blows,
 And seamed with sharp lips and fierce fingers,
 And branded by kisses that bruise;
 When all shall be gone that now lingers,
 Ah, what shall we lose?

Thou wert fair in the fearless old fashion,
 And thy limbs are as melodies yet,
 And move to the music of passion
 With lithe and lascivious regret.

What ailed us, O gods, to desert you
 For creeds that refuse and restrain?
 Come down and redeem us from virtue,
 Our Lady of Pain.

All shrines that were Vestal are flameless,
 But the flame has not fallen from this;
 Though obscure be the god, and though nameless
 The eyes and the hair that we kiss;
 Low fires that Love sits by and forges
 Fresh heads for his arrows and thine;
 Hair loosened and soiled in mid orgies
 With kisses and wine.

Thy skin changes country and colour,
 And shrivels or swells to a snake's.
 Let it brighten and bloat and grow duller,
 We know it, the flames and the flakes,
 Red brands on it smitten and bitten,
 Round skies where a star is a stain,
 And the leaves with thy litanies written,
 Our Lady of Pain.

On thy bosom though many a kiss be,
 There are none such as knew it of old.
 Was it Alciphron once or Arisbe,
 Male ringlets or feminine gold,
 That thy lips met with under the statue,
 Whence a look shot out sharp after thieves
 From the eyes of the garden-god at you
 Across the fig-leaves?

Then still, through dry seasons and moister,
 One god had a wreath to his shrine;
 Then love was the pearl of his oyster,¹
 And Venus rose red out of wine.
 We have all done amiss, choosing rather
 Such loves as the wise gods disdain;
 Intercede for us thou with thy father,
 Our Lady of Pain.

In spring he had crowns of his garden,
 Red corn in the heat of the year,
 Then hoary green olives that harden
 When the grape-blossom freezes with fear;
 And milk-budded myrtles with Venus
 And vine-leaves with Bacchus he trod;
 And ye said, 'We have seen, he hath seen us,
 A visible God.'

What broke off the garlands that girt you?
 What sundered you spirit and clay?
 Weak sins yet alive are as virtue
 To the strength of the sins of that day.
 For dried is the blood of thy lover,
 Ipsithilla, contracted the vein;
 Cry aloud, 'Will he rise and recover,
 Our Lady of Pain?'

¹ Nam te præcipuè in suis urbibus colit ora
 Hellespontia, cæteris ostreosior oris.

Cry aloud; for the old world is broken:
 Cry out; for the Phrygian is priest,
 And rears not the bountiful token
 And spreads not the fatherly feast.
 From the midmost of Ida, from shady
 Recesses that murmur at morn,
 They have brought and baptized her, Our Lady,
 A goddess new-born.

And the chaplets of old are above us,
 And the oyster-bed teems out of reach;
 Old poets outsing and outlove us,
 And Catullus makes mouths at our speech.
 Who shall kiss, in thy father's own city,
 With such lips as he sang with, again?
 Intercede for us all of thy pity,
 Our Lady of Pain.

Out of Dindymus heavily laden
 Her lions draw bound and unfed
 A mother, a mortal, a maiden,
 A queen over death and the dead.
 She is cold, and her habit is lowly,
 Her temple of branches and sods;
 Most fruitful and virginal, holy,
 A mother of gods.

She hath wasted with fire thine high places,
 She hath hidden and marred and made sad
 The fair limbs of the Loves, the fair faces
 Of gods that were goodly and glad.

She slays, and her hands are not bloody;
 She moves as a moon in the wane,
 White-robed, and thy raiment is ruddy,
 Our Lady of Pain.

They shall pass and their places be taken,
 The gods and the priests that are pure.
 They shall pass, and shalt thou not be shaken?
 They shall perish, and shalt thou endure?
 Death laughs, breathing close and relentless
 In the nostrils and eyelids of lust,
 With a pinch in his fingers of scentless
 And delicate dust.

But the worm shall revive thee with kisses;
 Thou shalt change and transmute as a god,
 As the rod to a serpent that hisses,
 As the serpent again to a rod.
 Thy life shall not cease though thou doff it;
 Thou shalt live until evil be slain,
 And good shall die first, said thy prophet,
 Our Lady of Pain.

Did he lie? did he laugh? does he know it,
 Now he lies out of reach, out of breath,
 Thy prophet, thy preacher, thy poet,
 Sin's child by incestuous Death?
 Did he find out in fire at his waking,
 Or discern as his eyelids lost light,
 When the bands of the body were breaking
 And all came in sight?

Who has known all the evil before us,
 Or the tyrannous secrets of time?
 Though we match not the dead men that bore us
 At a song, at a kiss, at a crime—
 Though the heathen outface and outlive us,
 And our lives and our longings are twain—
 Ah, forgive us our virtues, forgive us,
 Our Lady of Pain.

Who are we that embalm and embrace thee
 With spices and savours of song?
 What is Time, that his children should face thee?
 What am I, that my lips do thee wrong?
 I could hurt thee—but pain would delight thee;
 Or caress thee—but love would repel;
 And the lovers whose lips would excite thee
 Are serpents in hell.

Who now shall content thee as they did,
 Thy lovers, when temples were built
 And the hair of the sacrifice braided
 And the blood of the sacrifice spilt,
 In Lampsacus fervent with faces,
 In Aphaca red from thy reign,
 Who embraced thee with awful embraces,
 Our Lady of Pain?

Where are they, Cotytto or Venus,
 Astarte or Ashtarothe, where?
 Do their hands as we touch come between us?
 Is the breath of them hot in thy hair?

From their lips have thy lips taken fever,
 With the blood of their bodies grown red?
 Hast thou left upon earth a believer
 If these men are dead?

They were purple of raiment and golden,
 Filled full of thee, fiery with wine,
 Thy lovers, in haunts unbeholden,
 In marvellous chambers of thine.
 They are fled, and their footprints escape us,
 Who appraise thee, adore, and abstain,
 O daughter of Death and Priapus,
 Our Lady of Pain.

What ails us to fear overmeasure,
 To praise thee with timorous breath,
 O mistress and mother of pleasure,
 The one thing as certain as death?
 We shall change as the things that we cherish,
 Shall fade as they faded before,
 As foam upon water shall perish,
 As sand upon shore.

We shall know what the darkness discovers,
 If the grave-pit be shallow or deep;
 And our fathers of old, and our lovers,
 We shall know if they sleep not or sleep.
 We shall see whether hell be not heaven,
 Find out whether tares be not grain,
 And the joys of thee seventy times seven,
 Our Lady of Pain.

HESPERIA

OUT of the golden remote wild west where the sea without
 shore is,
 Full of the sunset, and sad, if at all, with the fulness
 of joy,
 As a wind sets in with the autumn that blows from the
 region of stories,
 Blows with a perfume of songs and of memories beloved
 from a boy,
 Blows from the capes of the past oversea to the bays of
 the present,
 Filled as with shadow of sound with the pulse of invi-
 sible feet,
 Far out to the shallows and straits of the future, by rough
 ways or pleasant,
 Is it thither the wind's wings beat? is it hither to me,
 O my sweet?
 For thee, in the stream of the deep tide-wind blowing in
 with the water,
 Thee I behold as a bird borne in with the wind from
 the west,
 Straight from the sunset, across white waves whence rose
 as a daughter
 Venus thy mother, in years when the world was a water
 at rest.
 Out of the distance of dreams, as a dream that abides
 after slumber,
 Strayed from the fugitive flock of the night, when the
 moon overhead

Wanes in the wan waste heights of the heaven, and stars
without number

Die without sound, and are spent like lamps that are
burnt by the dead,

Comes back to me, stays by me, lulls me with touch of
forgotten caresses,

One warm dream clad about with a fire as of life that
endures;

The delight of thy face, and the sound of thy feet, and
the wind of thy tresses,

And all of a man that regrets, and all of a maid that
allures.

But thy bosom is warm for my face and profound as a
manifold flower,

Thy silence as music, thy voice as an odour that fades
in a flame;

Not a dream, not a dream is the kiss of thy mouth, and
the bountiful hour

That makes me forget what was sin, and would make
me forget were it shame.

Thine eyes that are quiet, thine hands that are tender,
thy lips that are loving,

Comfort and cool me as dew in the dawn of a moon
like a dream;

And my heart yearns baffled and blind, moved vainly
toward thee, and moving

As the refluent seaweed moves in the languid exuberant
stream,

Fair as a rose is on earth, as a rose under water in
prison,

That stretches and swings to the slow passionate pulse
of the sea,

Closed up from the air and the sun, but alive, as a ghost
re arisen,

Pale as the love that revives as a ghost rearisen in
me.

From the bountiful infinite west, from the happy me-
morial places

Full of the stately repose and the lordly delight of the
dead,

Where the fortunate islands are lit with the light of ineff-
able faces,

And the sound of a sea without wind is about them,
and sunset is red,

Come back to redeem and release me from love that
recalls and represses,

That cleaves to my flesh as a flame, till the serpent has
eaten his fill;

From the bitter delights of the dark, and the feverish,
the furtive caresses

That murder the youth in a man or ever his heart have
its will.

Thy lips cannot laugh and thine eyes cannot weep; thou
art pale as a rose is,

Paler and sweeter than leaves that cover the blush of
the bud;

And the heart of the flower is compassion, and pity the
core it encloses,

Pity, not love, that is born of the breath and decays
with the blood.

As the cross that a wild nun clasps till the edge of it
bruises her bosom,

So love wounds as we grasp it, and blackens and burns
as a flame;



I have loved overmuch in my life; when the live bud
 bursts with the blossom,
 Bitter as ashes or tears is the fruit, and the wine thereof
 shame.
 As a heart that its anguish divides is the green bud cloven
 asunder;
 As the blood of a man self-slain is the flush of the leaves
 that allure;
 And the perfume as poison and wine to the brain, a delight
 and a wonder;
 And the thorns are too sharp for a boy, too slight for
 a man, to endure.
 Too soon did I love it, and lost love's rose; and I cared
 not for glory's:
 Only the blossoms of sleep and of pleasure were mixed
 in my hair.
 Was it myrtle or poppy thy garland was woven with,
 O my Dolores?
 Was it pallor of slumber, or blush as of blood, that I
 found in thee fair?
 For desire is a respite from love, and the flesh not the
 heart is her fuel;
 She was sweet to me once, who am fled and escaped
 from the rage of her reign;
 Who behold as of old time at hand as I turn, with her
 mouth growing cruel,
 And flushed as with wine with the blood of her lovers,
 Our Lady of Pain.
 Low down where the thicket is thicker with thorns than
 with leaves in the summer,
 In the brake is a gleaming of eyes and a hissing of
 tongues that I knew;

And the lithe long throats of her snakes reach round her,
 their mouths overcome her,
 And her lips grow cool with their foam, made moist as
 a desert with dew.
 With the thirst and the hunger of lust though her beautiful
 lips be so bitter,
 With the cold foul foam of the snakes they soften and
 redden and smile;
 And her fierce mouth sweetens, her eyes wax wide and
 her eyelashes glitter,
 And she laughs with a savour of blood in her face, and
 a savour of guile.
 She laughs, and her hands reach hither, her hair blows
 hither and hisses,
 As a low-lit flame in a wind, back-blown till it shudder
 and leap;
 Let her lips not again lay hold on my soul, nor her
 poisonous kisses,
 To consume it alive and divide from thy bosom, Our
 Lady of Sleep.
 Ah, daughter of sunset and slumber, if now it return into
 prison,
 Who shall redeem it anew? but we, if thou wilt, let us
 fly;
 Let us take to us, now that the white skies thrill with a
 moon unarisen,
 Swift horses of fear or of love, take flight and depart
 and not die.
 They are swifter than dreams, they are stronger than
 death; there is none that hath ridden,
 None that shall ride in the dim strange ways of his life
 as we ride;

By the meadows of memory, the highlands of hope, and
the shore that is hidden,

Where life breaks loud and unseen, a sonorous invisible
tide;

By the sands where sorrow has trodden, the salt pools
bitter and sterile,

By the thundering reef and the low sea-wall and the
channel of years,

Our wild steeds press on the night, strain hard through
pleasure and peril,

Labour and listen and pant not or pause for the peril
that nears;

And the sound of them trampling the way cleaves night
as an arrow asunder,

And slow by the sand-hill and swift by the down with
its glimpses of grass,

Sudden and steady the music, as eight hoofs trample and
thunder,

Rings in the ear of the low blind wind of the night as
we pass;

Shrill shrieks in our faces the blind bland air that was
mute as a maiden,

Stung into storm by the speed of our passage, and deaf
where we past;

And our spirits too burn as we bound, thine holy but mine
heavy-laden,

As we burn with the fire of our flight; ah, love, shall we
win at the last?

DEDICATION

1865

THE sea gives her shells to the shingle,
 The earth gives her streams to the sea;
 They are many, but my gift is single,
 My verses, the firstfruits of me.
 Let the wind take the green and the grey leaf,
 Cast forth without fruit upon air;
 Take rose-leaf and vine-leaf and bay-leaf
 Blown loose from the hair.

The night shakes them round me in legions,
 Dawn drives them before her like dreams;
 Time sheds them like snows on strange regions,
 Swept shoreward on infinite streams;
 Leaves pallid and sombre and ruddy,
 Dead fruits of the fugitive years;
 Some stained as with wine and made bloody,
 And some as with tears.

Some scattered in seven years' traces,
 As they fell from the boy that was then;
 Long left among idle green places,
 Or gathered but now among men;
 On seas full of wonder and peril,
 Blown white round the capes of the north;
 Or in islands where myrtles are sterile
 And loves bring not forth.

O daughters of dreams and of stories
 That life is not wearied of yet,
 Faustine, Fragoletta, Dolores,
 Félise and Yolande and Juliette,
 Shall I find you not still, shall I miss you,
 When sleep, that is true or that seems,
 Comes back to me hopeless to kiss you,
 O daughters of dreams?

They are past as a slumber that passes,
 As the dew of a dawn of old time;
 More frail than the shadows on glasses,
 More fleet than a wave or a rhyme.
 As the waves after ebb drawing seaward,
 When their hollows are full of the night,
 So the birds that flew singing to me-ward
 Recede out of sight.

The songs of dead seasons, that wander
 On wings of articulate words;
 Lost leaves that the shore-wind may squander,
 Light flocks of untameable birds;
 Some sang to me dreaming in class-time
 And truant in hand as in tongue;
 For the youngest were born of boy's pastime,
 The eldest are young.

Is there shelter while life in them lingers,
 Is there hearing for songs that recede,
 Tunes touched from a harp with man's fingers
 Or blown with boy's mouth in a reed?

Is there place in the land of your labour,
 Is there room in your world of delight,
 Where change has not sorrow for neighbour
 And day has not night?

In their wings though the sea-wind yet quivers,
 Will you spare not a space for them there
 Made green with the running of rivers
 And gracious with temperate air;
 In the fields and the turreted cities,
 That cover from sunshine and rain
 Fair passions and bountiful pities
 And loves without stain?

In a land of clear colours and stories,
 In a region of shadowless hours,
 Where earth has a garment of glories
 And a murmur of musical flowers;
 In woods where the spring half uncovers
 The flush of her amorous face,
 By the waters that listen for lovers,
 For these is there place?

For the song-birds of sorrow, that muffle
 Their music as clouds do their fire:
 For the storm-birds of passion, that ruffle
 Wild wings in a wind of desire;
 In the stream of the storm as it settles
 Blown seaward, borne far from the sun,
 Shaken loose on the darkness like petals
 Dropt one after one?

Though the world of your hands be more gracious
 And lovelier in lordship of things
 Clothed round by sweet art with the spacious
 Warm heaven of her imminent wings,
 Let them enter, unfledged and nigh fainting,
 For the love of old loves and lost times;
 And receive in your palace of painting
 This revel of rhymes.

Though the seasons of man full of losses
 Make empty the years full of youth,
 If but one thing be constant in crosses,
 Change lays not her hand upon truth;
 Hopes die, and their tombs are for token
 That the grief as the joy of them ends
 Ere time that breaks all men has broken
 The faith between friends.

Though the many lights dwindle to one light,
 There is help if the heaven has one;
 Though the skies be discrowned of the sunlight
 And the earth dispossessed of the sun,
 They have moonlight and sleep for repayment,
 When, refreshed as a bride and set free,
 With stars and sea-winds in her raiment,
 Night sinks on the sea.



